From *City of Angels* to a 'city in flux':

(Anti)Planning a middle-class Bangkok in a Thai–style Democracy

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Declaration

I, Petchpilai Lattanan confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

Date: 13/03/2017

Abstract

This dissertation contributes to existing literature on Southeast Asian middle classes, especially those interrogating the relationship between the rise of a new middle class and a specific form of capitalist urbanisation. This link, at least in the context of the Southeast Asian city, is not straightforward. While the economic boom in Southeast Asia from the late 1980s through to the mid-1990s fuelled the expansion of the middle class in parallel with the economic globalisation of several cities, the 1997 financial crisis challenged any related aspirations through a cycle of social, economic and political instability that have come to characterise the region. Amidst a complex political process of democratic change, and economic policies torn between global neoliberalism and welfare-oriented populism, a vagrant political standpoint parallels the rise of the new middle class, raising questions about their ability to act as influential agents of change, especially when it comes to planning a long-term urban agenda, neoliberal or otherwise. This is particularly evident in Bangkok, which in many ways has come to challenge our understandings of a quintessential Southeast Asian city, and whose political instability since the beginning of the twenty-first century has polarised the politics of the city's middle classes. Based on empirical research in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region focussing on planning policies around two urban infrastructure projects (SkyTrain and the 2011 floods), this thesis investigates middle class discourses that emerged in response to these efforts. Compounded by a specific form of Thai-style democracy, any effort made by the state-led planning machine to realise elements of bourgeois urbanism does not find unequivocal endorsement from the city's middle classes, as it reveals a strong ideological rupture between the lower and upper middle classes. As this thesis finds, this polarisation is due not just to the inherent heterogeneity of the middle classes as an inchoate social category, but one that is fuelled by the context of unstable democratic politics, highlighting not only the futility of a middle-class embedded planning process, but also the failure to take into account the localised specificity of divergent middle class reasoning.

Table of Contents

Table of Tables

Table of Figures

List of Acronyms

BERTS:	Bangkok Elevated Road and Train System
BMA:	Bangkok Metropolitan Administration
BMR:	Bangkok Metropolitan Region
BIBF:	Bangkok International Banking Facilities
BOI:	Board of Investment
BTS:	Bangkok Mass Transit System
CBD:	Central Business District
EBMR:	Extended Bangkok Metropolitan Region
ESB:	Easter Sea Board
FDI:	Foreign Direct Investment
GBP:	Great British Pound
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
HPAEs:	High Performing Asian Economies
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
MRT:	The Metropolitan Rapid Transit
MRTA:	Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand
MSDHS:	Ministry of Social Development and Human Security
NEDB:	National Economic Development Board
NESDB:	National Economic and Social Development Board
NESDP:	National Economic and Social Development Plan
NHA:	National Housing Authority
NIE:	Newly Industrialise Economy
NSPRT:	Network of Students and People for Reform of Thailand
OTOP:	One Tambon One Product
PAD:	People's Alliance for Democracy

PEFOT:	People's Democratic Force to Overthrow Thaksinism
SCG:	Siam Cement Public Company Limited
SRT:	State Railway of Thailand
TDRI:	T*hailand* Development Research Institute
THAICID:	Thai National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage
THB:	Thailand Baht
TRT:	Thai Ruk Thai Party
UDD:	United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship
USD:	U.S. Dollar

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I dedicate this thesis to King Rama IX, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who recently passed away. He was the inspiration for me to come abroad for my research but at the same time retaining my keenness to return and participate in Thailand's development debates. King Rama IX said those who have opportunities to study higher education have also duties to improve, develop, and do something good for their own and their country. I hope to do so with the knowledge I have gained through the critical scholarship of this PhD.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The World Bank published in the latter half of 1993 a policy research report titled *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*. The report was encouraged by the popular phrase: the East Asian Economic Miracle, drawing attention to the growing interest in the economic rise of East Asian countries. It focussed on Asian Tigers and Newly Industrialising Economies (NIEs) where Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore were classified as The Four Tigers, and Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand whose real income per capita more than doubled between 1960 and 1985 were identified as the Newly Industrialising Economies (NIEs). Equally impressive were other welfare development indicators such as the fall of poverty and inequality, better life expectancy, birth and death rates and increased primary education enrolment. The general conclusion was that the dramatic economic growth of these High Performing Asian Economies (HPAEs) was fundamentally supported by the fostering of particular development policies such as targeting increased saving levels and improved education opportunities. Justifying this through the phenomenal GDP growth in these Asian countries, it was predicted that they would be new leaders in the regional economy, and also to the world economy over a longer period. However, in the case of Thailand, the World Bank's prediction came at the beginning of an economic decline as well as a period of acute political distress against a dictatorship-led authoritarian regime. It seemed as if the World Bank report had overlooked the particularities of a very regional political economy where Thailand, an NIE country, experienced not only political instability but also showed the unsustainable nature of East Asia's new economic growth. In less than half a decade, the East Asia Economic Miracle had become a myth.

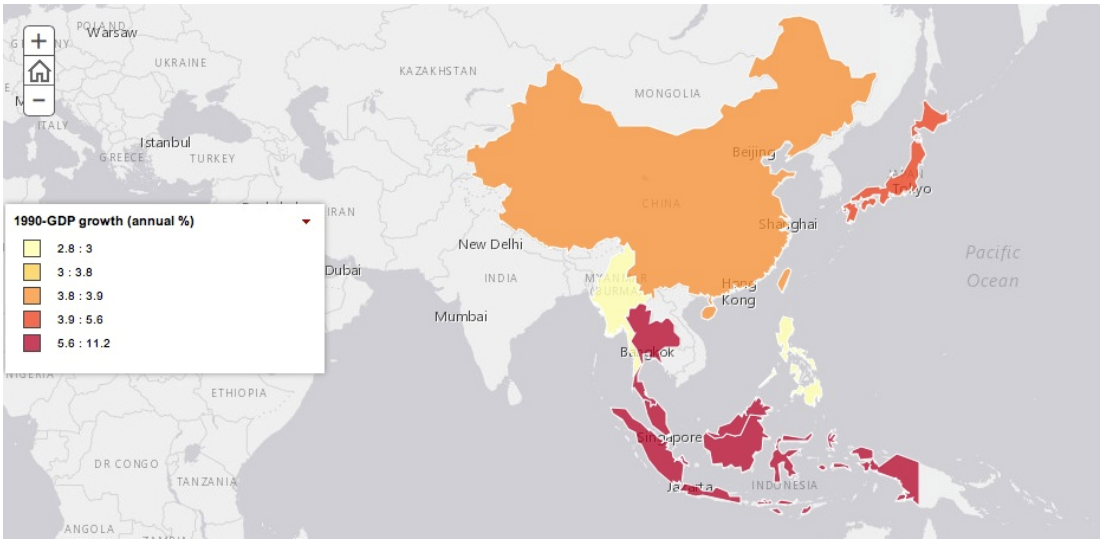
In hindsight, scholars have now identified several criticisms about *The East Asian Miracle*, drawing attention mostly to the fact that the report focussed too much on economic growth estimates, overlooking locally related factors as well as the inherent instability of the region's political economy. Thus, Nobel laureate Paul Krugman (1998) expressed scepticism about the report and the

so-called Asian miracle, claiming it an exaggeration. Similarly, economist Alice H. Amsden (2008), reviewed *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public policy* and found that it fails to discuss the ineffective industrial and banking policies in East Asia, one that can hardly be a model for other countries. More locally, a Thai political scientist at Thammasat University, Julachep Chinwano (2015) also argued that the World Bank report concluded as if the NIE countries were going to successfully develop their economies following the four Asian Tigers. However, since early 1992, the NIEs and Asian miracle economies had already started to show signs of a bubble economy (*ibid*.). This may have been caused by the nature of NIEs that quickly expanded, especially after the mid-1980s, relying more on foreign investment in stock markets and real estate development than from the expansion of the production sector. Supporting these ideas in a specific study on one of the NIEs, namely Thailand, Pasuk Phongpaichit (1996) argued that the Thai economy of the mid-1990s was already displaying stress from this unexpected rapid economic growth and she warned the government of macroeconomic instability and more specific consequences such as poor infrastructures provision.

Nevertheless, the notion of an Asian economic miracle brought Thailand, one of the NIEs, into global spotlight. It cannot be denied that Thailand, at one point, showed the highest economic performance among all NIEs (Figure 1-1). In addition, Figure 1-2 represents a comparison graph of NIE GDP annual growth rates from 1960-1996. During 1985-1991, Thailand significantly dominated the highest GDP growth annually. With a sharp rise of GDP in 1986 reaching over 12% and a slight fall in the early-1990s, Thailand's economic performance was outstanding compared with other NIEs. This phenomenon brought about an optimistic view of Thailand and its economic growth; it was expected to become a regional powerhouse, and come closer to economic maturity (Bell 2003: 43). This belief was shared by both Thai and foreign economists and officials. Indeed, *Thailand's Macroeconomic Miracle* (Warr and Nidhiprabha 1996) and *The Fifth Tiger: A study of Thai Development Policy* (Muscat 1994) are examples of documents spelling out the details of macroeconomic policies promoting the Asian and Thailand economic miracle.

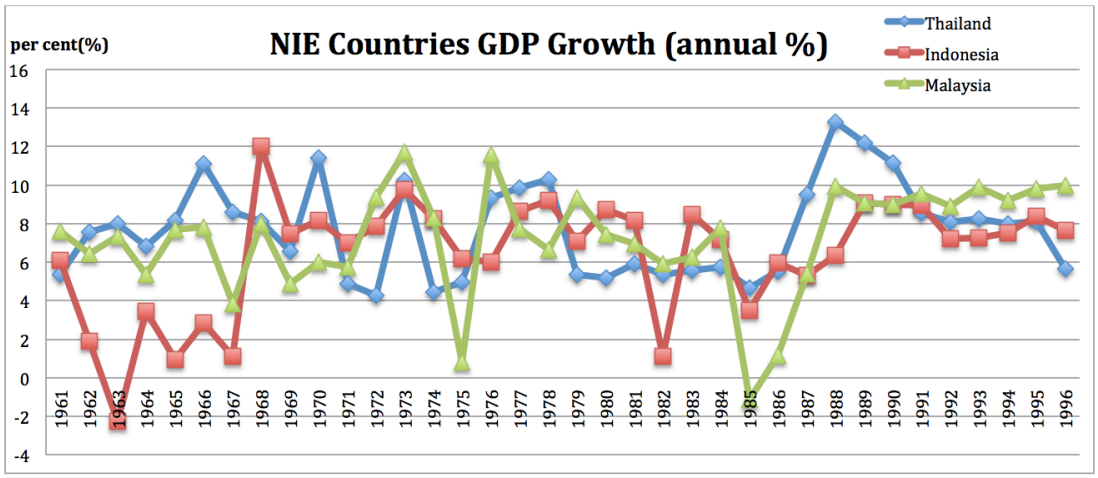
Unfortunately, this optimism proved to be short-lived. In 1997, Thailand, the highest performing Asian country, experience a burst of its economic bubble triggering an Asian financial crisis.

Figure 1-1: GDP Growth Annual in 1990 on a world map



Source: World Bank (2016)

Figure 1-2: NIEs countries GDP Growth (annual %) during 1961-1996



Source: World Bank (2016)

The contradiction of Thailand achieving one of the highest economic performances in Asia and becoming suddenly the cause of the 1997 Asian crisis is striking to say the least. While many would argue that Thailand's exceptional rise was due to an interventionist state policy typical of East and Southeast Asia, this is not entirely the case. From mid-1980s onwards, Thailand benefited largely from a strongly performing Yen, allowing its Baht to devalue

purposefully, thereby triggering a shift of Japanese industrial bases to Thailand. As a result, foreign direct investment increased leading to not only a massive growth of production but also real estate development, concentrated mostly in Bangkok. The fact that there was reasonable political stability during the mid-1980s to mid-1990s also helped reassure investors. The role of Bangkok in this became central as the Thai government established 'Bangkok International Banking Facilities' (BIBF) in 1993. BIBF was expected to be a tool to promote Bangkok as a regional financial centre (Sheng and Kirinpanu 2000). This policy aimed towards an open free financial market in order to find cheap finance to improve production structures for export. It also provided support to increase housing supply by offering mortgages to homebuyers and housing investment loans to developers. BIBF essentially allowed offshore money to flood the Thai economy, one that was not controlled by any conditions or systems of the Thai government, together with a fixed exchange rate (Thai Baht rate is fixed against the US dollar); this eventually proved unsustainable for the Thai financial market, its collapse acting as a catalyst for the overall economic downfall.

There is as well the fact that the Thai government was not a proactive player as many would assume but a passive one, relying on an economic development model from the 1960s, the National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP). Set up in 1961 by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, the first Thailand NESDP was aimed at encouraging economic growth. The first NESDP (1961-1966) concentrated on improving Thai living conditions and on industrialisation through foreign direct investment (FDI). There was much emphasised within NESDP I on infrastructure development such as the construction of roads, bridges and dams. This continued through into the later versions, resulting in a condition of uneven development, one where Thailand's economy relied more and more on Bangkok's performance as the primate city, not just a capital city, with some even suggesting that Bangkok is Thailand. This is not surprising as seen in the report *Thailand – is it Bangkok?* published by the Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University, Thailand. The report combines articles focusing on the biased nature of public policies favouring Bangkok over the rest of Thailand, ensuring Bangkok as a location that ideally serves both

domestic and export markets (cited in Ayal 1992: 358). To be honest, concentration of Thailand's development in Bangkok goes back to the mid-nineteenth century during the Chakri Reformation or Chulalongkorn Modernisation initiated by King Chulalongkorn, King Rama V (1853-1910). The reformation became the foundation of all subsequent policies and development, including urban development, with a focus on its capital city, and an intention of delivering Bangkok to outward multi-centres across Thailand. This modernisation referred to a reformation in Thailand's ruling system where the monarchy's centrality was used to develop a nation-state, consolidating administrative, ideological and financial control centrally at the top. The resulting version of Thailand that presented a united version of Siam, was convinced that by focussing on Bangkok the centre would be strengthened and as a strategy it would help Thailand avoid colonisation. Instead, an internal colonisation tactic was employed pitching Bangkok against up-country:

> It is necessary to obtain a firm grip from upcountry and to use its resources to support the capital, in order to strengthen the centre against western power attack...avoiding western colonisation simply meant that we colonized our own people. (Gerneral Saiyud Kridphol cited in Dilokvidhyarat 1983: 1)

During this era, Bangkok was overhauled through an intensive programme of modernisation and development, a way of sending signals to western powers that Thailand was a developed nation and thus did not require their interference. New technologies and new western style developments were employed in Bangkok's urbanisation even as the rest of the country languished. Bangkok was the first Thai city where schools, universities, hospitals, electricity, water supply, roads and tram facilities were built. International ports, both air and sea, were located in Bangkok ensuring that it became a logistic hub, a governing centre and an education centre. This continues unabated with subsequent governments consolidating their political power through Bangkok.

Thus, through a mix of economic growth and deliberate state policies, Bangkok expanded significantly during the twentieth century, but one albeit with non-effective urban planning. With almost all urban development

decisions focused on the objective of economic growth, Bangkok's development projects have overwhelmingly focused on mega schemes such as airport hubs, high-speed trains, huge convention centres and sports complexes (Douglass 2002). Even though such projects failed to address the city's every day development concerns, it did not stop its land prices from skyrocketing through the 1990s (Table 1-1).

Table 1-1: Land Price Increase in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (1987=100)

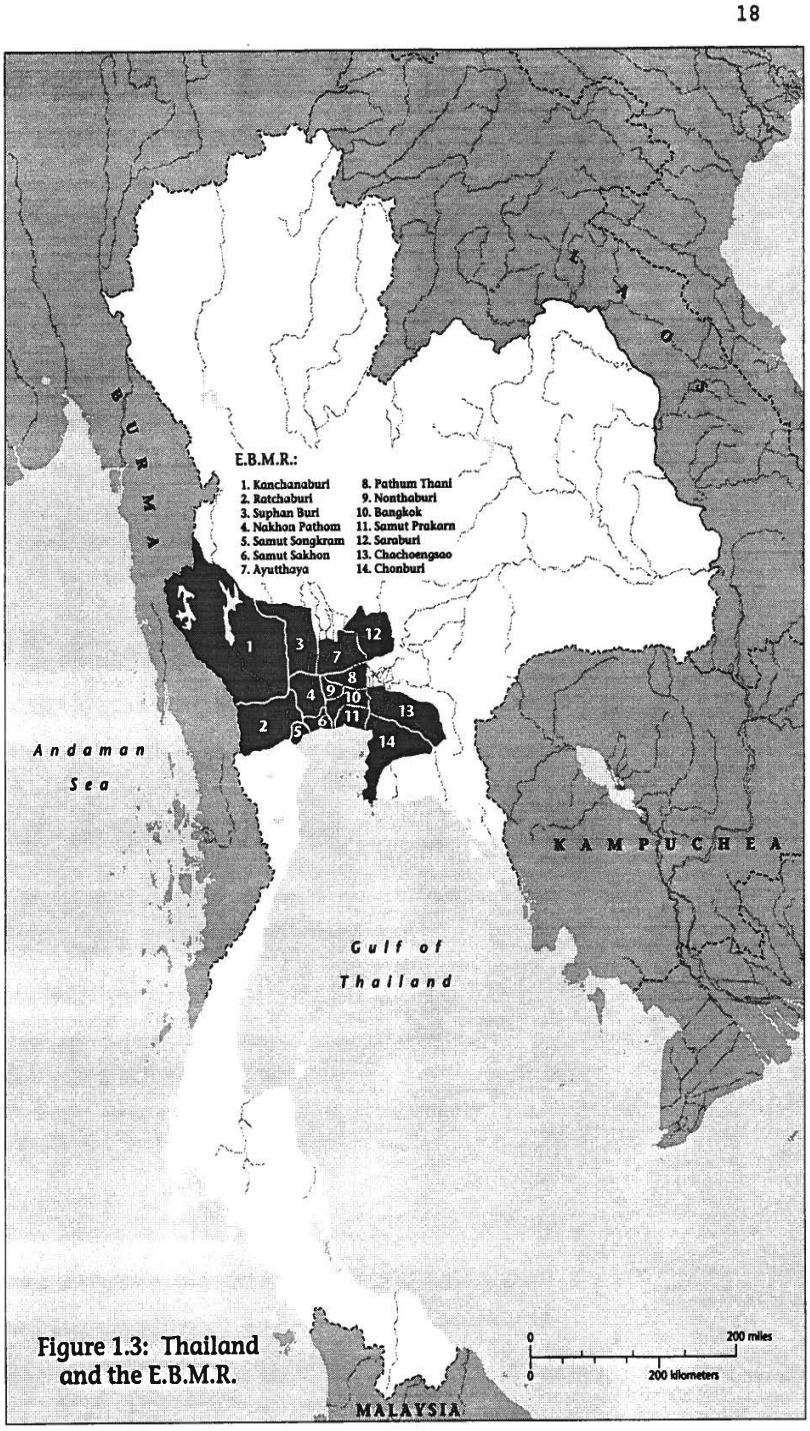
Location	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Central Business District	100	159	235	347	459	471	488	500	518
Inner	100	153	247	380	480	527	540	560	580
Intermediate	100	184	288	444	510	584	624	664	708
Outer	100	233	679	2133	2271	2779	2996	3225	3475

Source: Agency for Real Estate Affair (1997: 69)

With a sharp increase in prices and an increasing demand for land, real-estate development became an economic priority. Therefore, the Thai government forced commercial banks to loan a certain percentage of their credit to reduce the cost of housing (Sheng and Kirinpanu 2000). Unable to keep up with Bangkok's expansion problems and exponential increases in its land price (especially at the peripheries), the Thai government started to encourage urban development to nearby cities to sustain the economic momentum. But in trying to spread urbanisation away from Bangkok, all that the government was able to achieve was an spill over to its outlying areas, resulting in an extended metropolitanisation of Bangkok that took on its own form of urbanisation. Thus, the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR), including five provinces in the

territory, was eventually developed to become the Extended Bangkok Metropolitan Region, which includes the original BMR and another 8 provinces, 3 from the north, 2 from the east and 3 from the west (Figure 1 - 3).

Figure 1-3: Bangkok's Extended Metropolitan Map



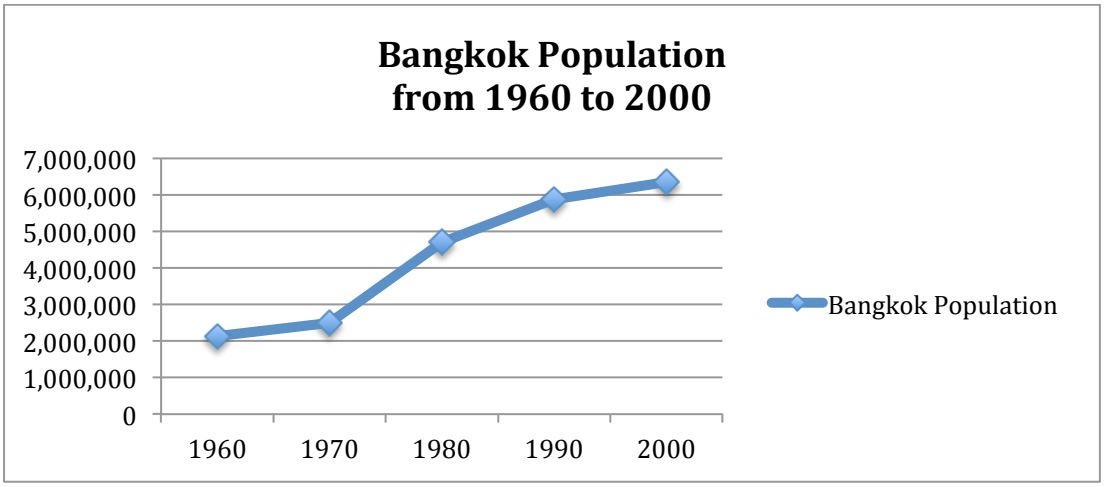
Source: Greenberg (1994)

Through a politically wilful process of hyper-urbanisation (McGee 2002), Bangkok became not only a primate city but also a symbol of Thailand's uneven

development. Bangkok city area was 21 times greater than Chiang Mai, the second largest city recorded in 1947. In 1960 and 1967, Bangkok stood at 27 and 32 times larger than Thailand's second largest city through a growth that was exponential. Bangkok's urban area was only 4.14 square kilometres when it was first built. In 1900, Bangkok's urban area was 13.31 square kilometres, then 143.42, 347.39, 585.54 square kilometres in 1967, 1986 and 1995, respectively (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration). This rapid urbanisation has forced the government to relinquish a controlled process through urban planning, leading to stereotypes of an unplanned city (Askew 2002; King 2011). Most noticeable is the 'traffic congestion' as narratives abound of Bangkok citizens spending a few hours on the road during rush hour in the morning and in the evening. Only buses and a fleet of paratransit vehicles including the tuk-tuks were public transport options for commuters until 1999 when the first rail mass transit system operated in Bangkok. The fact that there were no mass transit systems in the city during the economic boom era in itself is telling. Instead, the super block, a large rectangular area bounded by major roads, was a feature of Bangkok at this time with the government unable to build roads that cut into the centre. Urban land-use is another issue that proved to be a challenge. Bangkok has no clear land-use zones and the government has been unable to introduce it in the city. This has generally caused much criticism from the city residents, particularly the middle classes, an aspect that is explored in further detail in this thesis.

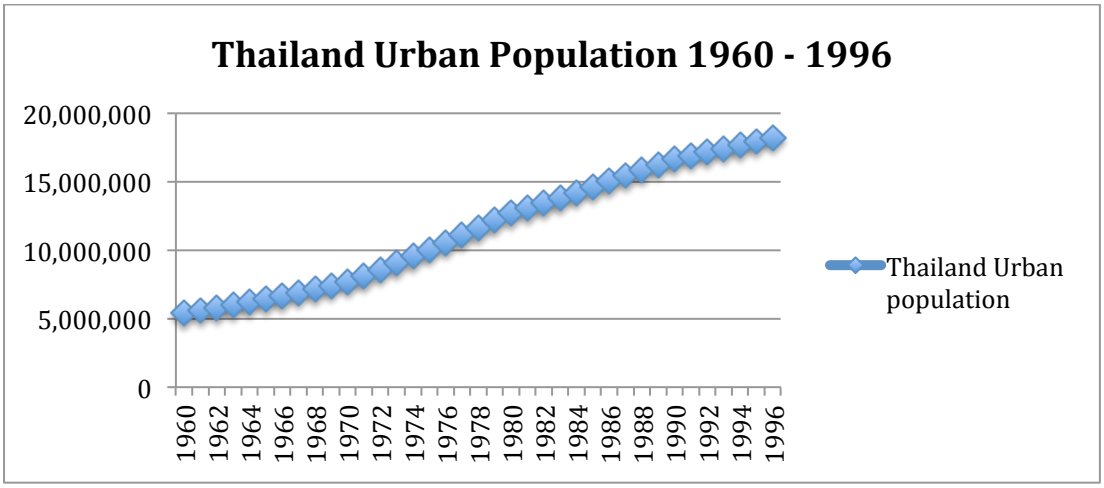
Bangkok's primacy has also been due to rural-urban migration, a phenomenon that has resulted in the growth of the middle classes (Phongpaichit 1982). The economic boom between 1960s and 1990s played a critical role in the maturation of the middle classes, who later became crucial to both the economic growth and political stability in Thailand (Tantuwaanich 2007; Petchprasert 2005; Eawsriwong 1997). Also, Bangkok's urbanisation was one that was favourable to the middle classes (Li 2010). Alongside Bangkok's population increase (Figure 1-4) is the rise in Thailand's urban population (Figure 1-5) at not dissimilar rates of growth, with Bangkok accounting for nearly 80 per cent of Thailand's urban population (World Bank 2016).

Figure 1-4: Bangkok Population from 1960-2000



Source: Thailand National Statistic Organisation (2016)

Figure 1-5: Thailand urban population 1960-1996



Source: World Bank (2016)

It was this middle-class embedded urban growth that provoked a specific form of Bangkok's urbanisation, one that was driven by real estate speculation around housing. The only intervention the state could provide was to encourage growth in the outer peripheries, areas that accounted for more than 60 per cent of Bangkok's EMR and ones that are administratively fragmented (World Bank 2016). Such developments were encouraged with cheap off-shore loans from the financial markets allowing an upwardly mobile middle class to enter the home ownership segment (with some as investors as well). This phenomenon created an inflated market housing demand, which in turn, led to slow selling a few years prior to the 1997 economic crisis. There were enormous swathes of

empty real estate, that simply sat empty. Real estate companies were not able to pay back their debts, and also, retail customers were unable to pay off their loans. Financial firms who suffered unpaid loans were unable to payback their foreign loans, a domino effect that caused the financial crisis.

Moreover, the stock market was bloated with capital inflow into the country, as Paul Krugman (1998) argued. Stock markets and industrial development encouraged land price and working payment rate increases with an intention of increasing production. As a result, Thai export products became expensive, with a steep decline in export. At the same time, there was an oversupply in real estate for offices, industrial assets and housing. All government policies that initially aimed to encourage and maintain Thailand's economic performances did manage to achieve this to some extent. However, without good management and robust policies to control capital flow, the government introduced a risky and unstable economic structure that developed into a bubble economy.

On July 2, 1997, the bubble finally burst, following what is now widely understood to be an inefficient management of economic development policies by the Thai government. Economists such as Jonathan Leightner (1999) have argued that uncontrolled liberalisation of capital inflow led to a destabilisation of short term capital inflow instigating the crisis. Government policies meant to sustain economic growth proved ironically to be its ultimate weakness as well as forced policy errors within the national financial sector structure introduced imbalances within the country's macro economy (Laplamwanit 1999). The much touted BIBF that allowed unregulated offshore money movement generated an enormous international debt in both public and private sectors. In 1997, Thailand's debt was US$100b, at about 55 per cent of Thailand's GDP with 70 per cent of this debt attributed to the private sector through short-term loan (Chinwano 2015). While the going was good, this reckless foreign short term loans had created a real estate market bubble as speculative investment based developments such as golf clubs, housing, office buildings, apartments and industrial assets sharply increased between 1987 and 1996. As real estate

prices exceeded actual market prices by several times, there was a point when it peaked and then began to fall, coinciding with Thailand's debt crisis moment due to slowing down of the export sector and a general decline in world economic growth. As the Thai government struggled to safeguard its economic growth, it tried desperately to secure the exchange rate. But by May 1997 it had to use its foreign reserve to defend the value of the Baht. By losing more than 90% of its foreign reserve, the government was forced to announce a switch to a flexible exchange rate system on July 2, 1997, instigating a national financial crisis and eventually the Asian economic meltdown. In general, it was realised rather belatedly that the region suffered from a combination of surplus investment, high loans, too great a domination of dollar debt and weakening payment position balances. This economic collapse was felt keenly in Bangkok where major urban development projects were either cancelled, delayed or paused, prominent amongst these being the cancellation of the hyped Bangkok Elevated Road and Train System (BERTS), Hopewell Project, one that had been on the board since 1990, combining national rail, sky train and road expressways in one, leaving unfinished structures dotting the cityscape (Figure 1-6).

Figure 1-6: Failure of concrete structures - BERTS

Source: Apocalypse19 (2011)

Another project that was established during the economic boom was the mass transit system, Bangkok SkyTrain (BTS) along with an underground system, a project that was delayed by the crisis but managed to see the light of the day two years later, becoming operational in 1999. The underground system (MRT) took much longer opening in 2004. During the crisis, any semblance of planning

Bangkok came to a standstill as the city continued to suffer from poorly coordinated agencies struggling with an ineffective land-use planning, compounded by the local government's limited financial and political power. While some were hopeful about the crisis being an opportunity for the state to finally take the city back from speculators, what really happened was the rise of a vast array of ghost landscapes with unfinished and empty buildings dotting the city. There was 755,00 housing units built in Bangkok from 1992 to 1996; however, government housing research shows that 40.4 per cent of those houses still remained unoccupied in 1999 (Leightner 1999).

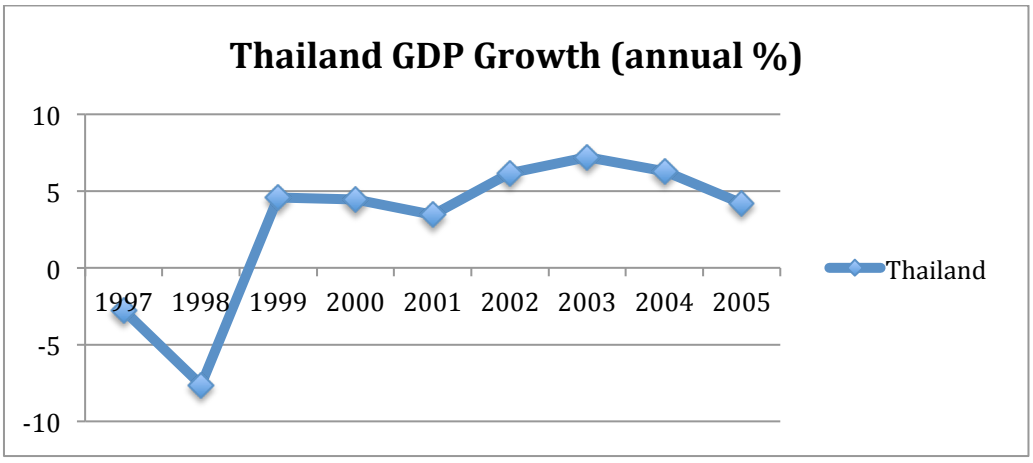
As jobs were lost and families sank into debt, there was an intense polarisation within the Thai society where even the most stable social class, the middle class, found itself adversely affected resulting in its fragmentation. An impoverished middle class found itself joining the vulnerable poor as the lower middle class while the upper cream of the middle class managed to secure itself by aligning with the Thai elite society. This social polarisation created an opportunity for a new kind of politics to emerge on the scene, a personality-cult based rise of Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Love Thai (TRT) party. He introduced a slew of subsidised policies to restore confidence amongst the poor and the lower middle class, one that was resented almost immediately by the upper middle class and the elites, especially since his populist government was seen to challenge the traditional power base of the royalist-nationalist supporters. In fact, it was against their hegemonic assertions that the poor had reacted resulting in the 1932 democratic revolution, kicking off the first off many revolutions the country would see through the twentieth century. This first one was short-lived, when in 1938, Field Marshal Phibun Songkram seized power. During his regime, the power of the constitutional monarchy was considerably constrained (Fong 2012). But soon after World War II, the royalists managed to wrest power back with the support of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who ruled from 1958-1963, but established an alliance between the military and monarchy that allowed some semblance of stability through the subsequent decades despite attempts at revolution (both pro-democracy and pro-dictatorship) at frequent intervals (1973, 1976, and 1992). Middle-class

support was crucial for all these agitations, often revealing their fickleness, initially supporting the student demonstrations of 1973, then lining up with business groups against the rise of an extreme leftist politics in 1976, and switching again to the now famous 1992 pro-democracy movement. Just when it was believed that the cycle of Thailand's political instability fluctuating between military coup and democratic protests was finally over, the economic collapse of 1997 brought the focus again to Thai politics, ushering in yet another kind of political phenomenon with the democratically elected regime of Thaksin Shinawatra.

1.1 What follows an economic crisis? Political instability in the twenty-first century

In the end, the financial crisis did not last too long, even though its damage can be considered longstanding. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Thailand's economy had recovered sufficiently. Although Thai GDP annual growth is not as high as the GDP growth rate seen during the economic boom era, GDP growth rate improved from -8% to 4% in 1999. As shown in figure 1-7, after 1999, Thailand's GDP growth rate remained steady until 2001, the year of the national elections where Thai Ruk Thai, Thaksin Shinawatara's party won to form a coalition government.

Figure 1-7: Thailand GDP Growth (annual %)



Source: World Bank (2016)

Coming from a prominent business family in Chiangmai province, Thaksin Shinawatra's prosperity story is one typical of economic boom years when he successfully set up several businesses to amass a personal wealth with assets over US $2bn. He entered politics in 1994, though it was only a year after the economic crisis that he founded his own political party, Thai Ruk Thai (or Thai Love Thai). His sole mandate was to pull the country out of the economic slump, with a popular party slogan "kid mai Tum mai Puer kon Thai tuk kon" (New idea, new actions for all Thais). His party promised to reform Thailand's infrastructure to be competitive with modern world developments and to solve rural economic problems. He also promised to pay all outstanding IMF debt. As a result, his party won 248 seats out of 500 seats in the Thai parliamentary elections in 2001, a new phenomenon in Thailand's electoral history. Also, Thaksin created a record by heading a government that, for the first time, completed a four-year term in Thailand's political history. His mostly populist policies were targeted at the poor and the lower middle class, and also emphasised rural development programmes. He also managed to keep the upper middle class and the elites satisfied if not entirely convinced by his political agenda.

Thus, despite several crises including extra-judicial killings by the government in its crackdown on the drug trade, burgeoning HIV/AIDS epidemic, continued Islamic insurgency in the South and the 2004 December tsunami which devastated communities on the south-west coast, Thaksin Shinawatra managed to score a landslide victory in 2005 to begin a second term as the country's Prime Minister. But this time, his support base amongst the upper middle class and the elite groups reduced drastically as they took exception to what they considered was a wasteful reallocation of taxpayers' money (i.e. that of the middle classes) to schemes favouring the 'undeserving poor'. While the upper middle class mostly cite unacceptable levels of corruption in Thaksin's second term, it is more their acute sense of economic insecurity that had them supporting the 2006 military coup overthrowing Thaksin Shinawatra from power. Since then, the country has been thrown into political chaos with little signs of stability being restored anytime soon.

Furthermore, Bangkok has become a site of intense confrontations between the supporters of Thaksin (Red Shirts, the colour of the party and the national flag) and those aligned with the elites supporting the return of a royalist-nationalist reign or what scholars have come to refer to as Thai-style democracy (Yellow Shirts, symbolising the colour of the King). The latter were led by Sondhi Limtongkul, a media mogul, and Chamlong Srimueung, a well-known Thai political movement actor. They brought together a motley crew of political parties to form the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). It was the demonstrations led by the Yellow Shirt that led to the military capturing power on 19 September 2006 while Thaksin Shinwatra was out of the country attending a UN meeting in New York. He chose to remain in exile following the coup, but urged his supporters to form a counter coalition called the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD). Their insistent marches forced the acting Prime Minister to call for snap elections in 2007, which was won by Thaksin's brother-in-law. This victory was immediately contested by the Yellow Shirts who were still roaming the streets of Bangkok and hadn't really disbanded. Since then the country has been experiencing a political yo-yo between the two groups, whose demonstrations are rarely peaceful and flare into violent confrontations as seen in May 2010 when 80 civilians were killed in clashes between the protesters and the military. Such violence casts middle class support for either side of political position (either from the upper middle class for the Yellow Shirt or the lower middle class for the Red Shirt) in poor light as their engagement with the country's transition to genuine democracy becomes suspect.

1.2 Uncertainty of the middle classes

While the continued polarization between the Yellow Shirts and the Red Shirts dominate the country's turbulent political landscape, its broadly bipartisan politics between the royalist elites and the peasants/poor notwithstanding, questions have been raised over the simplified assumptions of relationship between class and politics in such a context. Thrown into disarray, for example are established understanding of the role and significance of the middle class in upholding democracy. Unlike the clarity of the early 1990s when middle class

protests in 1992 were central to putting Thailand firmly on the path to democratic consolidation (Englehart 2003), there is no coherent middle-class position vis-à-vis the protest politics of either camp. In fact, as Sathiniramai (2010) has argued, the polarisation in Thai politics between the Red Shirts and the Yellow Shirts is not a simple divide between the urban and the rural or the poor and the middle class (and the rich), as there were segments of the middle class who supported either camp depending on their own self-interests. Thus, Yellow Shirts do not encompass all of Bangkok's middle classes, as it has now become clear that the Red Shirts draw a major portion of their support base from the lower middle class (Eawsriwong 2010; Arpornsuwan et al. 2012; Wongthat 2010). This murky nature of class intersections across the Red and Yellow Shirts needs to be acknowledged to resist falling into the binary trap. Nevertheless, broadly there is a clear rupture within the middle classes where one group (lower middle class) is more focused on the right to democracy while another (upper midde class) demands good governance over democracy.

After the military coup in 2006, tensions simmered between the Yellow and Red Shirts. The spotlight once again fell on questions about class and politics in Thailand. It was argued that the middle class was a primary faction contributing to the furtherance of democratic development in the 1990s (Yoshifumi 2008), but according to the more recent political situations in Thailand, the middle class, it has been argued, are more pro-authoritarian or anti-democracy and a key player in having brought about post-democracy in Thailand (Glassman 2010; Eawsriwong 2009b; Ungpakorn 2007). Several studies have already emphasised the inconsistency of middle class support for democracy (Chen and Lu 2011; Englehart 2003), as prosperity, social status, income, social changes and their relationship with the state can swing middle class political inclinations from one extreme to the other (Petchprasert 2000; Piriyarangsan and Phongpaichit 1993; Chen and Lu 2011). In this regard, middle classes have become an important factor that researchers, social scientists and academia employ to examine democratisation processes and to understand the instability of democratisation in developing countries such as Thailand. Middle class actions related to democracy during the twentieth

century have convinced researchers to develop an argument about the Thai middle classes and their unpredictable relationship with democracy as a twentieth century political phenomenon.

What is to be noted here is that the Thai middle classes did not consolidate around a pure democratic ideology, as was the case in most Western societies. Instead, their power was tied up with their pursuit and securing of benefits, rather than ideology. The common argument here is that while the middle class might be able to install democracy, they are unable to consolidate it (Masisrikrod 1997). This is because political alliances amongst the state, the capitalist and the middle class are not necessarily based on democratic stability. Rather, lacking a strong ideological commitment, the middle class is more capable of reacting to certain political issues or a crisis in the short term than in setting a long-term political goal. Also, what is often not acknowledged is the fact that the democratic concept of Thai middle class and the actual democratic process in Thailand are different. We need to be aware of this before simply blaming the middle class for blocking democratisation in Thailand. This is specifically addressed by Thai scholar Anek Laothamathas, whose work *Two Tales of Democracy* (1996) identified the need for a resonance between the urban middle classes and the rural poor if Thailand is to develop a genuine democracy. This is further addressed in his later work where he bemoans the fact that while policies are in the hands of the urban middle classes, voting power is in the hands of the rural poor (Laothamathas 1997; 2010). As they find that the democratic character of Thailand shows no similarity to their own sense of democratic ideology, they turn away from democracy and towards the more bureaucratic notion of governance.

On the contrary, the supposed political movement of the middle class in 1973, 1976 and 1993 convinced Thai researchers to examine the middle classes mainly in terms of who they are, how they emerged, their character, and how they are crucially related to politics and the economy. This has resulted in publications such as Narong Petchprasert's (2005) *Thai middle class in capitalism*, which elaborates on the origin of Thailand's middle class as well as

their impact on politics and economy. Unfortunately these publications pursued a simple socio-economic stratification of Thai middle class missing its complexities. Most Thai middle classes prove to be of mixed social origins with a large number rising from the lower urban strata. Funatsu and Kagoya (2003) argue that because of these characteristics, the social consciousness of the Thai middle classes is more complex than the stereotyped explanation, and contains elements that cannot be fully explained by a perspective based on class theory. This complicates any study of the relationship between the middle classes, the broader discourse of national politics and the specifics of urban development. More importantly, when a capital and economically primate city like Bangkok becomes a political battlefield where different forms of nationalisms and an extreme division of classes force the city and its members to mobilise, often in violent ways (*ibid*.), it is difficult to predict the direction in which an intrinsically heterogeneous social group such as the middle class might swing.

The pressing need here is the need to clarify the positionality of the middle class amidst such a protest culture, one that comes from the fact that the middle class can be a useful lens through which one is able to grasp the impact of such popular forms of dissent on a city like Bangkok's more longstanding development aspirations. This becomes pertinent especially since there is a history of planning and policy decisions framed in support of a specific form of capitalist urbanisation catering to a 'middle-class way of life'. In this regard, this thesis is an attempt to not only understand how the wider persistence of a continued protest culture affects the developmental aspirations of a city like Bangkok, but more specifically, how it has influenced key planning decisions which are threatened by incessant political instability. In this context, more specifically, this thesis explores what happens to dominant social classes (i.e. the middle classes) who have so far been seen as key drivers of a specific urban agenda, and what their agency is in making a case for (or not) the major urban infrastructure projects. Thus, the research question is framed on two levels:

1. How has Bangkok's urban development agenda been affected by the bipartisan nature of the protest politics dominating a vulnerable Thai-style democracy since the beginning of the twenty-first century?

2. How has the instability of this dissenting culture influenced the positionality of the Thai middle classes vis-à-vis, not just democracy, but the agenda of capitalist urbanisation?

1.3 Research challenges and research aims

Most studies about the middle class, even the geographically specific ones such as those on Southeast Asian middle class or the narrower Thai middle class pay little attention to the middle class as a socio-political category concentrating more on how it is identified, classified or categorised. While the latter is an ingrained problem for anyone researching the middle class, as they will at some point have to confront questions about how one defines and selects the middle class for research purposes, we need to go beyond this quantitative preoccupation as to who constitutes the middle class to think more in terms of what is the middle class at an ideological level. While the numeric conundrum is addressed in further detail in the methodology section, it is helpful to note here that whatever Thai data is available skirts around the issue of clearly assigning a middle class category to its demographic classifications (Pongmakapat 2015). Commonly used indicators such as income, consumption and expenditure patterns, or home ownership tell only a partial story. Moreover, such a statistical approach provides little insight into the characteristics of a social class that is better off with a loose definition.

A second challenge is the lack of a clear zoning in Bangkok. The aim of this research was to choose at least two middle class neighbourhoods in comparison demonstrating its heterogeneity across a spectrum of variables even though it is almost impossible to pinpoint such areas clearly. In fact, there is not one homogenous middle class landscape per se in Bangkok, but instead we have different iterations of what can be considered as typical middle class neighbourhoods. Using displays of middle class lifestyles as a way of

differentiating the middle classes, an upper middle class neighbourhood was chosen not based on any clear demographic profile but simply on the understanding that they would be older than lower middle class neighbourhoods, given the profile of Bangkok's middle class growth. This was cross- checked with maps of where the demonstrators tended to congregate showing areas of clear support for either the Red or Yellow Shirts. Thus, Bangna was chosen as an area comprising mostly of upper middle class residents with a tendency to support the Yellow Shirts. On the other hand, Nonthaburi province, within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, is marked as a Red Shirts zone. One cannot be absolutely certain that people from this province all support the Red Shirts and are all from the lower middle class. Nevertheless, Bangyai district, a part of Nonthaburi provinces and on the periphery of BMR was selected after visiting several neighbourhoods a few times and undertaking a visual character assessment of these places. Details of the two case study areas will be discussed further in the methodology chapter. The two middle class neighbourhoods epitomise the fragmented nature of the Thai middle classes that are divided by their democratic concepts, their roles in politics and their lifestyles, and what they seek from Bangkok as a city and its urban development.

The final research challenge is in studying on-going issues that are constantly evolving and never really resolved. The research needs to be up to date and able to adapt accordingly to the changing nature of the discourse so that participant interviews are robust and relevant. This became apparent with the three specific urban development projects chosen to investigate middle class viewpoints: the Bangkok Comprehensive Plan, the Bangkok Skytrain (BTS) extension project and the newly proposed flood protection schemes for the city in the aftermath of the 2011 floods. Further details of the three policies and projects are discussed later. The Comprehensive Plan 2013 is at the heart of the city's urban development despite frequent accusations (especially from the middle classes) of it being a 'failure', an argument that is more carefully unravelled in Chapter 5. The other two projects are significant given the important role they played in the broader Thai political debates. Given the volatility of the country's political condition, the nature and discourse of the two

projects kept changing often and this had to be constantly addressed and adapted to the research. Conversations with the middle class residents about these projects reveal that there is not one single consistent middle-class discourse when it comes to planning visions for Bangkok, a heterogeneity that has been rendered further unclear by the unstable politics of Thai-style democracy as it is manifested in the urban condition.

1.4 Outline

In order to examine how the specific nature of Thai-style democracy (explained further in Chapter 3) and its dissent politics have influenced middle class perceptions of Bangkok's urban development agenda, this thesis at a broader level begins by revisiting the conceptual reference frame of 'Southeast Asia', one that has become a standard flag bearer for, not only the region's urbanism, but also its middle class. Thus, Chapter two, *Bangkok: A city in flux,* as an effort in theorising Bangkok reviews literature that have contributed to the discourse of the Southeast Asian city, and its relevance as an appropriate analytical lens in understanding Bangkok's specific aspects of urbanisation (from early modernisation to contemporary efforts in terms of globalisation and counter-globalisation). In addition to providing a historical overview of the city's urbanisation trajectory, a central engagement of the chapter is with the 'problems of reading, writing and representing Bangkok and the Southeast Asian city in general' that Askew (2002: 4) uses as the starting point in his evocative ethnography of the city. After a decade and a half of political turmoil where plans for the city are continually made and unmade (often catering to party rhetoric more than anything else), his questions still remain relevant: 'to what extent do the spatial and economic transformations taking place in Bangkok suggest a convergence towards an urban form and function seen as common to the contemporary cities throughout the world?; in what ways can global processes be seen to be responsible for key changes in the spatial economic and social character of the Thai metropolis?; and what has been the role of the Thai state in facilitating and mediating these changes' (*ibid.*). In the past decade, the city has become a virtual battleground between different political camps (the Yellow shirts and the Red shirts) affecting not only several

urban mega-infrastructure and development projects (by either stalling them or changing them to suit their own ideas) but also damaging considerable parts of the urban fabric as a signifier of a contested ideology. In a context where the city's planning process has unplanned the city more than anything else, a continued assertion of often violent forms of dissent have also affected the way the residents engage with the city's urban agenda, one that is drawn up in bits and pieces and in whichever way one sees it will be less and less coherent.

Chapter 3 moves on to examine another angle of the Southeast Asian conceptual underpinning, and that is the discourse of the Southeast Asian middle class. A series of studies on the Thai middle class emerged in the 1990s on the back of Southeast Asian middle class scholarship, with a particular focus on either their broader politics (supporters of pro-democracy movements in the early 1990s) or their role as a new consumer class. In the terms of the former, it is more of an enthusiasm than anything else, for, given the complex landscape of transition to democracy in several Southeast Asian countries, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact role of the middle class in this process, as many of these countries remain in a semi-democratic situation of sorts and the middle class have not been able to push for a complete democratisation of the socio-political framework.

More importantly, if we were to take a prolonged historical overview of the Southeast Asian middle class then it will be clear that their support for democracy often oscillates with their endorsement of dictatorship. This chapter by critically reviewing the literature on the Thai middle class queries in the first instance the extent to which they can be considered as an extension of the Southeast Asian middle class. Secondly, it focuses on how there is no clear understanding of their political positionings, as much due to their own desire for self-preservation as it is due to a constantly shifting loyalties from regime to regime. This preoccupation with the broader politics of the Thai middle class has deterred any in-depth study of their quotidian practices and engagement with the everyday state. Thus, while the Thai middle class, especially those in Bangkok are seen broadly as supporters of modernisation and globalisation, we

still have little understanding of how this is conveyed and through what kind of agency or action. Drawing on wider literature that ties together a specific form of capitalist urbanisation with the interests of the new middle class, this chapter concludes by considering the urban agenda of Bangkok's middle class, especially amidst the political instability of the twenty-first century.

Chapter 4 details the methodology adopted for this research. Qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and document analysis, were used to study Thai middle class responses to the on-going debate about the transformative nature of Thai politics and how this influences their responses to questions about Bangkok's urban planning and development. Recognising the heterogeneity of a middle class discourse, fieldwork was conducted in two neighbourhoods, Bangna and Bangyai, with the former a predominantly upper-middle class area and the latter populated by newly urbanised lower middle class residents. Twenty-two scholars (planners, academics, transportation policy makers, mass transit providers), and ninety middle class residents were interviewed. Commencing briefly with a discussion of the political climate, its instability and repercussions for the city's image/reputation, questions were asked about how they perceived the impact of this turmoil on everyday as well long-term planning aspirations for the city. In a context where the urban development agenda since the 1990s has been viewed primarily as one targeting the aspirations of the middle class, members of the middle class were asked about their support of the city's planning policies and how it has been affected by a decade of persistent dissent politics. To ensure that these conversations did not become discursive, their comments were solicited on three specific planning efforts: the Bangkok Comprehensive Plan 2013, Bangkok SkyTrain BTS extension project and the flood protection schemes announced for the city in the wake of the 2011 floods. Besides primary data from the two fieldwork sites, secondary data in terms of published and unpublished reports, policy and planning documents and governmental orders were also collected and reviewed.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the empirical findings. While there is a wider literature outlining the strong influence of middle class embedded interests in the framing of a city's planning, policy and development agenda, with projects catering to the middle class lifestyle (Vasconcellos 1997), there is little systematic study of the everyday undertaking of the middle class in influencing such decisions. From 2006 to 2011, the political atmosphere in Thailand, at times merely simmering and at other times boiling over into violence created not only strict socio-political divisions based on ideological loyalties but also wriggled itself into the decision making of key policies. Acutely aware of political interference (driven by populist or vindictive interests), the middle class could no longer take for granted planning as a process and questioned vesting its interests in such an apparatus. This was clearly seen in their responses to the series of schemes announced by the government in the wake of the 2011 floods which the middle class approached with scepticism and suspicion. Even though the state openly solicited middle class support for its flood protection programmes, the polarisation of the middle class political consciousness since 2006 has resulted in sharply divided reactions.

To further explore this lack of a coherent middle class discourse, Chapter 6 discusses middle class reaction to proposals extending a long-standing transport infrastructure project in the city – the Bangkok SkyTrain (BTS). As a travel option patronized by the middle class, the BTS through a series of deliberate planning decisions has been promoted as a middle-class choice of travel mode. Again, not universally embraced all sections of the middle-class, planners have had to repackage the BTS as an elite form of circulation, as a result of which proposed extension lines are located in geographically exclusive areas, supported by an accompanying landscape of consumption, deterring the lower end of the middle class spectrum from using the BTS. The irony here is that in the wake of political unrest, planning has come to increasingly favour the upper middle classes, a group that is clearly opposed to empowering politicians with planning decisions, and one that insists on urban development remaining a bureaucratic agenda rather than a political bargaining instrument.

Lastly, Chapter 7 provides a conclusion to this dissertation, reflecting on the repercussions of the ongoing, often colour-coded and sometimes highly-charged divisions in politics and their causes: personality cult politics of the Red Shirts versus the Yellow Shirts' preference for a traditionalist Thai-style democracy and what it means for a key socio-political actor, i.e. the middle class, and how it has affected their engagement with Bangkok's urban development agenda.. While the fragmentation of the Thai middle class at the upper and lower end of the spectrum is not unfamiliar, it is a polarisation that has been exasperated by the divisive politics of dissent in the past decade. Also affected is the way Bangkok plans its urbanisation strategy through a planning process that is increasingly politicised, and as a consequence results in decisions that ironically favour the interests of a highly sceptical upper middle class and alienate the demands of a more supportive lower middle class.

Chapter 2 Bangkok: A city in flux

> "The process of Southeast Asia integrating into the global system during 1990s was not only limited in economic linkage … in the flow of migrants, tourists, industrialisation, and urban scape transformation flew into Southeast Asia cities following with the representation of the city space as a globalizing city. However, the 1997 economic crisis in combination with recession in Southeast Asia have highlighted the changing roles that urban systems are likely to play." (Kelly and McGee 2003)

Ever since T G McGee set the course of theoretically and empirically studying the Southeast Asian city, there is a well-developed sub-discipline within area studies that has accumulated a wealth of scholarship on the Southeast Asian city. Most of them link the fortunes of the Southeast Asian city with the region's globalisation and its aftermath, particularly the (in)stability of economic development and socio-political movements. While scholars working within this framework recognise the plurality of the different cities possibly not subscribing to a singular understanding of the Southeast Asian city, there is also the fact that Bangkok occupies only a marginal position within this academic discourse, raising the question of how comfortable can one be in applying the Southeast Asian city discourse to our understanding of Bangkok. The larger question being, is Bangkok distinctive in a way that merits a theorisation in its own terms? Or, is this the case for almost any city? Thus, at one level, the chapter adopts a historical approach in understanding the city's evolution from its early foundations to its self-colonisation and its subsequent development as Thailand's primary city in the latter part of the twentieth century. At another level, it also uses the city as a way of critically engaging with efforts to theorise the Southeast Asian city. The chapter begins with the latter point in the following section reviewing extant theories of Southeast Asian urbanisation, and what it means for our understanding of Bangkok. This is followed by Bangkok's early urbanisation as it transitioned from a sacred or royal city to the peculiar years of 'self-colonisation'. Eventually, the city was reorganised as a mega-urban region, a move that coincided with the decision to pursue policies of economic globalisation. While the city's urban growth was clearly driven by planning policies oriented towards the desire of a global city, the 1997 financial

crisis had an impact on this, which is reviewed in this chapter. As Bangkok entered the twenty-first century, its fortunes seemed to take a turn for the worse yet again, when a series of political crises once again influenced its urban development. This is considered in the penultimate section of the chapter.

2.1 Theorising the Southeast Asian city

Delivering the keynote address at the Canadian Council of Southeast Asian Studies Biannual Conference at York University in Toronto, McGee (2005) drew from his five decades of research on Southeast Asia to reflect on the vast constructed knowledge of Southeast Asia, or what he felt were the many different ways of thinking about the region. Drawing specifically from his research on the Southeast Asian urbanisation process, he expresses his discomfort with the normative model of The Southeast Asian City (referring back to one of his early publications from the 1960s, based on the then prevalent "development process" and "dependency theory"). He boldly declared the urbanisation process as a "pseudo-urbanisation", one he acknowledges as a misreading in the 2005 conference. He also recognises the heterogeneity of the Southeast Asian urbanisation process, depending not only on the variations in economic growth and structural change, but more importantly on their pace of integration into the new global system that was a consequence of the overall processes of globalisation. There were some commonalities, such as the dominance of largest cities (often from the colonial period), on the country's urban system, with these cities often stretching out into extended metropolitan regions. Expanding out into areas of very high rural densities, such regionalisation was unique as it created zones of intensely mixed urban and rural activities in the peripheries of these cities a condition he labelled as 'desakota', a term that has come to be closely associated with the process of peri-urbanisation in Southeast Asia and beyond (McGee 1991).

While McGee's work remains central to the conceptualisation of the Southeast Asian city, not all are in agreement with his hypotheses. In the 1990s, following the rapid economic rise of cities in this region, the theories surrounding globalisation came to dominate following an accelerated period of

incorporation into the global economic system. While McGee had a more qualified view of what he termed, volatile globalisation, an approach that is justified by the 1997 financial crisis (McGee 2002), scholars such as Dick and Rimmer (1998, 2009) contended that a model of convergence with the North American patterns of urban spatial expansion is more suitable in explaining the Southeast Asian experience, viewing it as an open sub-system of the world economy. Douglass (1995, 2000), on the other hand, provides a more balanced overview where he shows that the mega-urban regions were a deliberate state-led policy in developing a Southeast Asian urbanisation geared towards establishing global cities. While this is not different from McGee's (1995, 1997) argument, he also sides with Dick and Rimmer's observation that such regions are centres of trading, transportation and the production of goods as well as acting as important nodes that link a country's economy to the world.

Despite their differences, all these scholars recognise that there is not a generic Southeast Asian city and what we write of is rather singular: the city in Southeast Asia. This was emphasised by Bunnell, Drummond and Ho (2002) in their *Critical reflections on cities in Southeast Asia* where they explored and rediscovered commonalities or unique points of Southeast Asia regional urbanisation. For example, the 1997 economic crisis left cities across Southeast Asia with widespread multifaceted problems, leaving behind fragmented urban economies. In almost a similar mode, Dick and Rimmer (2009) explored a range of perspectives of cities in Southeast Asia in order to seek a better understanding of processes that affected them, proposing to study cities in Southeast Asia as a set, rather than individuality. It is thus quite popular to combine comparative studies and area studies in explorations of Southeast Asia. Many studies are still using some part of the region to present a generalised idea of Southeast Asian Cities. Given the context of this discourse, one of the objectives of this dissertation is to see how a study of Bangkok contributes to our understanding of a "city in Southeast Asia", and in what way, if at all, does it challenge this discourse (or not).

The starting point here is the fact that in most of the literature, Bangkok's prospects do not receive a favourable viewing. Dick and Rimmer (2009) are not very complimentary about Bangkok's prominence as a Southeast Asian city, describing it, not only as a "national capital" against "globalising cities" such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur, but also as the world's most congested city. In their book, Dick and Rimmer (2009) frame Bangkok together with Manila and Jakarta, as a typical unplanned Third World city where the urban plan exists with ineffective practice. This failure is marked as a fundamental weakness of the government, at both local and national levels. These governments are not able to cope with the massive expansion of the cities during the economic boom decades (1950s–1990s). These issues have brought about various problems in the cities such as traffic congestion and pollution amongst other negative aspects. Bangkok in much of this literature is seen as a Third World national city, even though a few such as Smith and Taylor (1999 cited in Dick and Rimmer 2009) identify Bangkok as gamma world cities or minor world cities, against Singapore's alpha world city status.

There is a precedent to this perception. Discussing the characteristics of *The Great City in Southeast Asia*, Ginsburg (1955) was one of the earliest scholars to recognise Southeast Asian urbanisation as singularly associated with the largest cities in the region. Thus, in the 1950s, half of Thailand's urban population was living in Bangkok (in 2010 it is approximately 35 per cent).[1] At the same time, he cautions about the specificity of this urbanisation, where, first of all, the rapid growth of Bangkok was equalled and even exceeded by a number of rural *chagwats* (provinces) in central and south eastern parts of the country. He also noticed how many of the cities, such as Bangkok were very young, with foundations from the late 1700s and early 1800s, and whose indigenous foundation, which he highlighted as an exception, describing it as the "most indigenous of the great cities" (Ginsburg 1955: 461). And yet, his portrayal of Bangkok as one of Southeast Asia's great cities seems to come with a qualification:

[1] According to World Bank data, Thailand's urban population in 2010 was 29,397,844. The Ministry of Interior, Thailand, stated that in 2010 Bangkok Metropolitan Region population was 10,326,093 (counted from registered population only) and in 2010 Thailand population was 63,878,267.

> Unlike the other great cities, Bangkok originated as the capital of a land-oriented agrarian state. Its proximity to tidewater was accidental. In 1822 the ship bearing the Crawfurd mission to the Thai court barely was able to cross the bar at the mouth of the Menam, then covered by only four feet of water. Its poor harbour and its remoteness from the major shipping routes of the South China Sea conspired to retard the development of the city as a port until the end of the nineteenth century and to retain it as an anachronism in Southeast Asia - a growing city, nearly great, surely primate, but indigenous rather than Western. Nevertheless, since it was through Bangkok that Western influences filtered into Thailand, it is a case of an indigenous capital acting as a revolutionary medium for socioeconomic change. (*ibid.*)

2.2 Urbanisation, the Bangkok way

The above portrayals of Bangkok within the Southeast Asian city discourse sit somewhat awkwardly against Bangkok-specific literature, which are more concerned with how a city like Bangkok is written into being, focussing less on mundane issues such as traffic and planning, and more on how the city is an indication of the Thai nation. This literature uses the city's social, economic, political and cultural transformations to think through various interpretations of its urbanisation. These are generally overlooked by Southeast Asian literature, particularly studies prior to the 1997 economic crisis, but ones that are crucial in understanding urbanisation systems. In fact, much of this scholarship steer away from the theoretical models of Southeast Asian city going right back to Krull and Melcher's (1964) early work *Bangkok: Siam's City of Angels*. It was one of the very first writing about Bangkok's urbanisation after World War II. The authors noted how Bangkok enters the development era with an advantage. Bangkok had one of the highest GDP performances in the region, apart from Singapore, from the 1960s – 1990s (see Chapter 1) and was labelled as the 'fifth tiger of Asia'. However, she resents its trajectory of change through an unsuitable process of Americanisation during Sarit's regime (1957-63), when skyscrapers began to crowd the skyline and road based construction supplanted the city's intricate network of canals and waterways. It took a couple of decades before another pertinent scholarship on the city would follow when in 1986 Korff published *Bangkok: Urban System and Everyday Life*. This book followed

on the heels of McGee's theory of Southeast Asia as a primate city even though this did not play an important role in the book's framing argument. It seems that Korff's emphasis was on interpreting Bangkok from its own social and cultural context. He argues that Bangkok was developed from a compact concentric city (King Rama I – King Rama III) to a V shape pattern (King Rama IV – World War II), and to a complex pattern with several directions of rapid extensions. Askew (1994, 2002), a key author on Bangkok, similarly argued that Bangkok is shaped by a Thai way of life and social power structures involving Thai society creating an intense, confused and complex city. Reinforced by previous Thai literature, he views social change (people, culture, politics) as key elements in shaping metropolitan cities like Bangkok. He marks Bangkok as a city in contrast and conflict resulting in tensions between the old and the new.

Bell (2003) is less complimentary about his description of Bangkok: Angellic Allusion where he presents the city as paradoxical, formless and fragmented, yet one that has fluidity and flexibility. Describing Bangkok as a city that is on the move and is constantly remade, he adds that the city's quest is about:

> Balance between order and social flexibility, between a belief in symbolic history and an acceptance of daily reality. Bangkok's ultimate messages: an acceptance of change and seeming chaos in the desire to maintain an open relation to the future. (Bell 2003: 166)

However, Ross King (2012) in *Reading Bangkok* questions if there is indeed a paradoxical fragmentation that contradicts the flexibility of formless Bangkok and represents Bangkok instead as a chaotic city. His is not unlike Dick and Rimmer (2009) where an unorganised and unplanned Bangkok city established a superimposition and juxtaposition that had led to the city becoming unpleasant in terms of scenery.

Such literature follows a developmentalist discourse where Bangkok's urbanisation is seen as unplanned, unorganised, contradictory, chaotic and complex, a city that has no solid form and is manipulated by social cultural

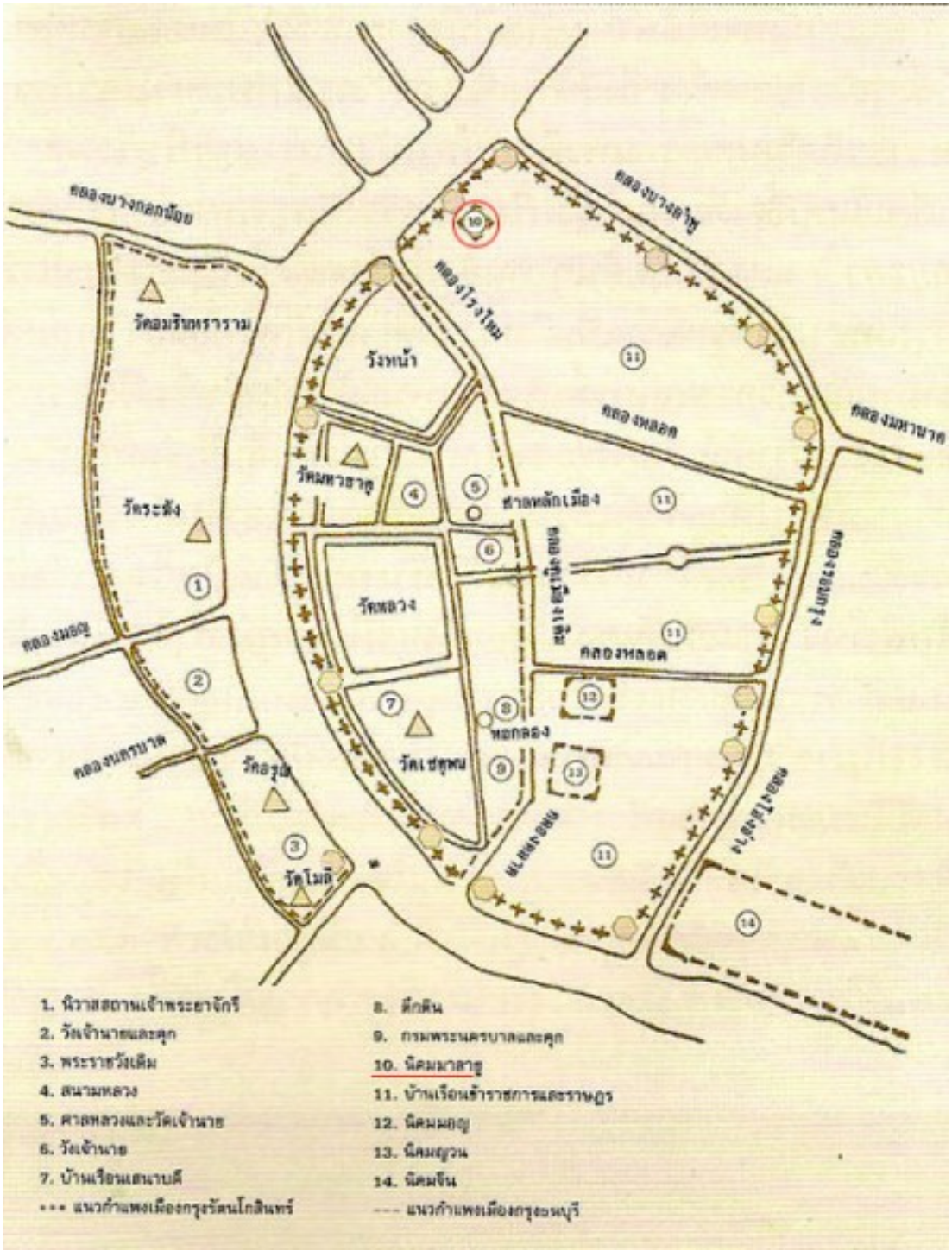
economic and political desires. Interpreting Bangkok by using social, economic, cultural and political factors, this literature shows that these are the main factors that have led to its urbanisation being different from other Southeast Asian cities. While Southeast Asia literature has been trying to form a theory representing and explaining Southeast Asia as a frame, Bangkok specific literature argue that its urbanisation cannot be viewed in such a way. With a different approach to interpreting the city, it shows that the Southeast Asia literature simplifies the uniqueness of the individual city. Economic factors and globalisation are not the only key elements that form the cityscape. Developing from same economic experiences and globalisation in the same region does not make Bangkok city patterns similar to other Southeast Asia countries. For one, we need to query even the extent to which Bangkok's urbanisation can be considered as state-led. Against a Southeast Asia literature stressing common forms of cities in this sub-region, descriptions of Bangkok as a "formless city as desired" (Bell 2003: 149) might seem a tad unfair, but we need to bear in mind that they are critical in interpreting Bangkok's urban transformation not only in terms of its history and geography, but more crucially in terms of socio–political processes.

2.3 First stage of transformation: From a sacred/royal city to self-colonisation

Ginsburg's (1955) remarks about Bangkok as a young city stems from the fact that it was founded in 1782, essentially as a sacred city constructed according to a Hindu-Buddhist cosmopolitan concept, and as the last in a series of 'forward capitals' after the destruction of Ayuthaya by the Burmese (Evers and Koff 2000; Hamilton 2003). Overlapping this notion was the significance of royalty, where the Siamese king was believed to be a god-king with the right to govern the city as well as the country as an absolute monarch. Hence, the city's construction was closely associated with the King's ideology (Evers and Koff 2000), whereby most development served the function of representing his status, interests and celebrating royal events and religious activities (Askew 1994). This resulted in the building of a vast array of temples and palaces

throughout the city. Figure 2-1 and 2-2 shows a map of Bangkok in 1786 and 1896 to give some idea about Bangkok territory at that time.

Figure 2-1: Bangkok 1786



Source: Alisuasaming (n.d.)

Figure 2-2: Bangkok 1896

Source: Tangsirivanich (2011)

This focus prevailed until King Rama IV (1851-1868), whose reign represented a transitional stage that eventually led to Bangkok's modernisation. In 1855, the King signed the Bowring Treaty with the British, which brought greater

freedom of trade between Bangkok's citizens and European merchants. Prior to this, products such as rice and weapons could only be traded by the King and his close associates. The subsequent greater involvement of commoners in the Thai economy resulted in Bangkok becoming a major trading centre of the colonial capitalist system (Douglass and Boonchuen 2006). These developments required the allocation of city spaces for 'public purposes' to allow trade to take place. Thus, at this time, the cityscape became a mixture of temples and palaces interspersed with public buildings joined by newly built roads for carrying out economic activities that continued to drive Bangkok's development. The city's urbanisation phenomenon is explained in Ginsburg (1955) wherein the capital city functioned as a linkage and filter of western urbanisation evidenced in the aftermath of the colonial era.

When Prince Chulalongkorn became King Rama V on 20th September 1868, colonisation in Southeast Asia was pervasive, with Siam being the one great exception to European subjugation. However, as the new king he had to engage in political manoeuvring to protect the country's independence, which involved ceding parts of Siam to the French and the British. He did this in return for an agreement that guaranteed the status of Siam as a buffer state between British and French colonies, one that did not entirely ensure its independence (Kiernan 1956). Therefore, Bangkok's leaders set out to consolidate the city as a cooperative and essential trading partner that would not require being colonised. The local elites, the king and aristocrats, implemented a process of self-colonisation to put Bangkok or Siam to be seen as civilised as European nations (Sintusingha and Mirgholami 2013), which eventually led to it rivalling Asian colonial nations such as Burma, Indonesia and Singapore (Schaeider and Susser 2003). How to ensure that Bangkok was perceived as a civilised city, the city that would appeal to imperial nations and cities?[2] Chao Praya Phanupong, one of the King's counsellors, advised the King that colonial cities could exemplify the European cities (Moore and Osiri 2013). As a result, the King visited both colonial and European cities, and after each visit, new constructions

[2] These words are borrowed from Moore and Osiri (2013); however, in this research imperial nations include Europeans and its colonial nations.

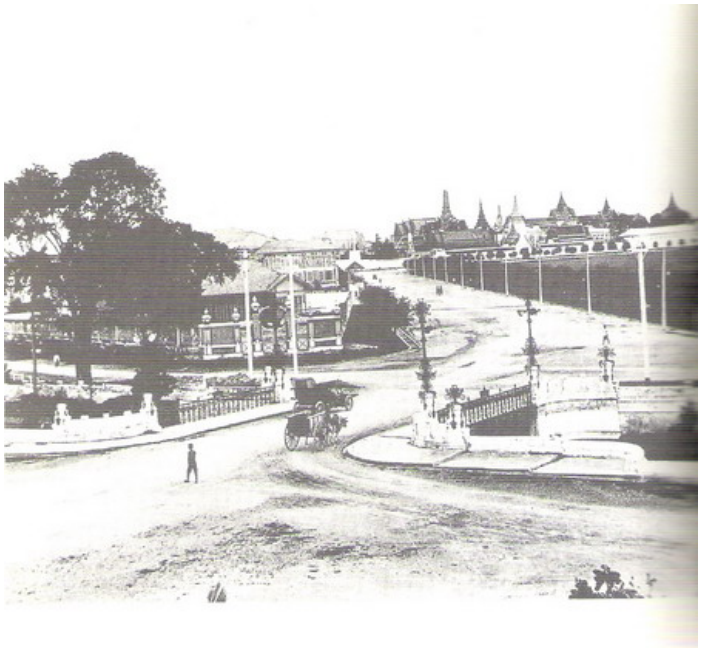
and developments in terms of architecture (buildings, roads,) and culture (winter markets, civil space for commoners) were introduced into the city. The King's vision was to transform Bangkok into an imperial city (Moore and Osiri 2013: 4). This was the beginning of the self–colonisation process; in other words, self–colonisation was how locals transformed their own city to look like a colonial city. Colonised cities and self–colonised cities are not only different in who enacts the transformation - the locals or the Europeans, but also different in the main objective of doing so. Colonial cities transformed by the Europeans was done for the European usage and comfort. On the contrary, self–colonisation, in this case Bangkok, transformed its own city into an imperial city, to be seen as civilised, and to reflect its resistance to colonialism (*ibid*.).

Figure 2-3: In 1863, the Bangkok first's modern road, Charoen Krung Road.

The Europeans called this road, New Road

Source: Enoch (2012)

Figure 2-4: Ratchadamnoen Road (Royal Promenade) during King Chulalongkorn or King Rama V era.



Source: Thai Film Foundation (n.d.)

Figure 2-5: Solider Marching in front of Ministry of Defence during King Chulalongkorn Era

Source: Prachatalk (2015)

Figure 2-6: Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall built in the King Chulalongkorn Era.

This hall is located at the end of Ratchadamnoen Road, which connects directly to the Grand Palace.

Source: Williams-Hunt Collection, courtesy of the School of Oriental and African Studies

Figures 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, and 2-6 show European architecture applied in Bangkok during the King Chulalongkorn era. Here, it needs to be noted that European transformations had different bearings on self-colonised and colonised cities. While the European colonies segregated social classes in the city, self–colonisation in Bangkok, Siam, created links between elites and commoners through civic spaces (Moore and Osiri 2013). As discussed earlier, Bangkok was a sacred city where most spaces were related to the King and for the King's activities, thus the transformation during colonisation brought new forms of civic spaces that allowed both commoners and elites to participate. For example, King Rama V established a winter market for both commoners and elites to enjoy. King Rama VI built the first park in Bangkok, again open to all.

This kind of civic space, apart from the temple, had never existed prior to his majesty the King Rama V's era. On the contrary, the European transformation spaces in the colonies were available to the Europeans or the native elites only.

Urban and civic spaces thus were essential to the legitimacy of political authority (Moore and Osiri 2013). The above discussion reinforces Askew's (2002) perspective that political power, the King's role, culture and the colonisation phenomenon in 19th century underpinned Bangkok's urban development pathway. Bangkok transformed itself from a sacred/royal city to become self-colonised [3] Lysa (2003) observed how this semi-colonisation produced a turn of the century Bangkok, which was not only the cosmological, royal, administrative and commercial centre of the Siamese kingdom, but also the key link to the world in terms of diplomacy, trade, communications, migration, information, consumption habits and the forms and usage of public spaces. This cosmopolitanism marked the entry point when European development began to flood the city and the surrounding countryside (Sintusingha and Mirgholami 2013). For example, Thailand was the first country in Southeast Asia to operate tram and rail services (Kamanamool 2004). Major roads were constructed in the city and the first automobiles in Thailand were imported towards the end of this era. In 1871, a school was constructed for boy commoners, and in 1874, the first school for girl commoners, which took education out of the religious domain and brought it into the public sphere. Efficient postal services as well as electricity and water supplies also developed for the very first time. In addition, the first modern hospital was established with the aid of European medical knowledge. Alongside these newly industrialised technologies there were improved living standards, European architecture started to spring up amongst the traditional, local style buildings. Most royal palaces, commercial buildings, public service buildings, as well as aristocrats and foreigners' houses, began to be constructed using European techniques and designs.

[3] Self-colonisation is a concept whereby culture or city development is dominated by the cultural power of Europe and the West without being invaded by any Western country (Sintusingha and Mirgholami 2013)

However, the European town model that was predominant in all other Southeast Asian cities was not particularly evident in Bangkok (Dick and Rimmer 2009). For, although it displayed elements of a 'European city', with administrative systems and a development pattern similar to those of Jakarta, Malacca or Kuala Lumpur, control still remained in the hands of the royalty and aristocracy. Whereas, in other Southeast Asian cities, ruling power was held by an elite, European class. The city's Central Business District (CBD) was thus centred on the Grand Palace as the birthplace of urbanisation, whilst in its Southeast Asian colonial counterparts, the old town was the place for the less well-off Europeans and Chinese. Colonial powers relocated their new city centres to areas of grand new buildings that represented colonial power. Consequently, Bangkok's urban form did not resemble the dual city model that was prevalent at that time. Various European styles of the day were adopted, depending on the preferences of the elites and the technologies available. For instance, after visiting Europe, King Rama V designed and constructed Ratchadamnoen Road or Royal Promenade (see Figure 2-4), having been inspired by pedestrian paths such as the Queen's Walk or the Mall, east of Green Park in London, and the Champs Elysees in Paris (Moore and Osiri 2013). A new throne hall, Ananta Sammakom, was built in the Italian Renaissance and Neoclassic styles and Vimanmek Palace incorporated both Neoclassic and Thai styles. The main railway station, Hua Lamphong, was designed with inspiration from London's King's Cross Station and Paris's Gare Du Nord. By contrast, Dutch colonials in Jakarta applied their own city plan and strict Dutch architectural styles, copying their ports and warehouses in Holland (Evers and Korff 2000).

Unlike other cities in the region where the colonial and colonised quarters were distinctly kept separate, Bangkok with its quasi-colonial state evolved into a city where the two styles mixed more freely, an aspect which according to King (2012) was not an advantage as he claimed that this resulted in Bangkok developing a muddled city image and landscape. He argues that it was a self-colonised city with one layer built upon another, devoid of any centralised planning. He asserts that this layering process, hastened during the economic boom eras and facilitated by the continually changing political situation,

resulted in the chaos that is evident today. According to him, this transformation from a sacred or royal city to becoming self-colonised in fact set the stage for the ongoing state of flux that continues to shape its character and cityscape. This has posed questions for the city's ability to adapt itself over time, as it struggles to sustain development through subsequent moments of crisis.

2.4 Urbanisation in an era of 'volatile globalisation'[4]

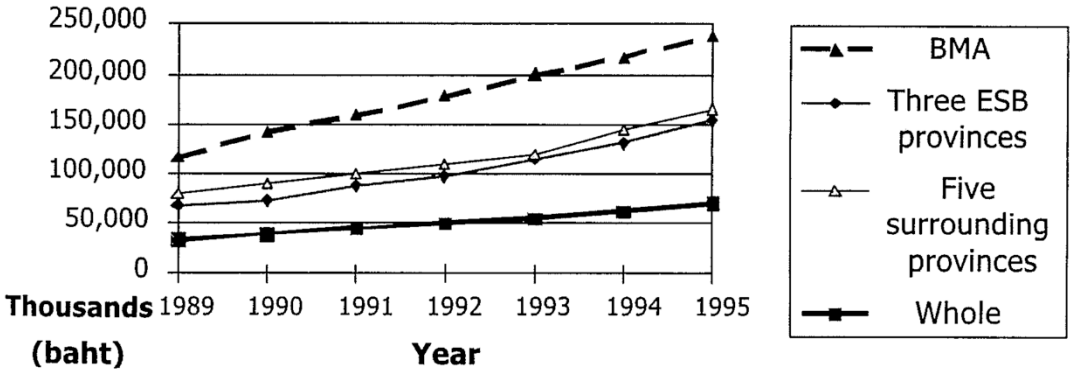
Bangkok was still a small city of approximately 550,000 inhabitants (Ouyyanont 1997) when the Thai democratic revolution took place in 1932. The 1932 democratic revolution occurred when some Thai bureaucrats overthrew King Rama VII and changed the country's ruling system from 'absolute monarchy' to a democracy with the King as Head of State. At that time, the governing power shifted from an absolute monarchy to the Thai elites, military and bureaucrats. However, this was short-lived when a military coup followed six years later with a long period of military regime from 1938 until 1973. During this time, successive military regimes prevailed, with only brief spells of civilian rule. From late 1973 onwards, there were several counter coups and pro-democracy protests on the streets of Thai cities in 1973, 1974 and 1976, followed by another military coup in 1991. In fact, throughout the following two decades the political situation alternated between democratically elected parliaments and military coups that reinstated dictatorship. However, despite this context of unstable politics, Thailand managed to achieve rapid economic and urban growth.

Military regime ruled Thailand during the golden period of the Thai economic boom, with the military playing a prominent role in determining Bangkok's urbanisation. While there might not be direct urban development strategies, economic policies indirectly shaped Bangkok's urban form from mid- to late-twentieth century. For example, the Board of Investment (BOI) policy, which is the investment promotion law that provided foreign investors' profit

[4] This term is borrowed from McGee (2002), which is the study published after the 1997 economic crisis when globalisation was clearly not introducing equality in the Southeast Asia region and when the local policies, recent history of Southeast Asia counties, needed to encounter globalisation discourse in order to understand Southeast Asia urban development.

repatriation guarantee, was announced in 1954 aiming to drive Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the country transforming Thailand into a modernising, industrial country. While the BOI policies successfully motivated FDI into the country as well as increased rates of industrialisation, in the eyes of military regimes, being modernised was seen to be equivalent to capturing the standards of European or American cities. This reliance on an American model became even more pertinent when USA and Thailand became close allies after World War II. During the Vietnam War, Thailand was the Southeast Asian military base for American Soldiers. As American aid flowed into the country, American consultancies were appointed frequently to advice on Bangkok's urbanisation challenges. Bangkok's rapid urbanisation in the mid-twentieth century was compounded by the spectacular growth of Thai economy when its GDP increased from 2.761 billion US Dollars in 1960 to 183.035 billion US dollars in 1996 with Bangkok's share being than 30 per cent (World Bank). Bangkok also received 75 per cent of the FDI, and provided 70 per cent of the nation's manufacturing employment (Douglass and Boonchuen 2006). This triggered a series of problems for the city, mostly around uncontrolled urbanisation from rural-urban migration and unplanned growth. In the 1980s, Bangkok's registered population was about 450,000 people, but the real number has been estimated at between 800,000 and 1,000,000. With the 1980 census showing Thailand's population at nearly 45 million (Thailand National Statistic 2016), it is clear that only 15-20 per cent of the Thai population really contributed to this shift in the economy, one that was reinforced by the Bangkok Metropolitan Area's continued higher GDP per capita than other provinces (Figure 2-7).

Figure 2-7: GDP per capita by Region



Source: Sauwaluk (2001: 367)

Besides an increasing demand on Bangkok's basic infrastructure of roads, water, electricity, there was also a demand for increased floor areas of offices and housing. As more commercial spaces were built in the city centre, land prices rocketed, forcing production activities and residential areas to the urban fringe.[5] This construction growth directly forced Bangkok city to expand in size. Figure 2-8 shows the urban development expansion of Bangkok from the 1900s-1990s and this gives a clear picture of how the city grew so much that it swallowed up much of the surrounding area. In fact, the built–up area expanded from approximately 67 square kilometres in 1947 to 90 square kilometres in 1956 (Askew 1994). But by the 1970s, it covered 185 square kilometres and only a decade later this figure shot up to over 239 square kilometres (*ibid.*). Moreover, the needs for labour increased migrating numbers of people from other parts of Thailand to Bangkok. Bangkok was seen as a job pool for migrants, and migration brought about increased demand for housing. This again stimulated real estate development, urging private developers to provide housing for the economic migrants. Table 2-1 shows the level of housing construction in Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) from 1987 – 1996. It shows that the number of housing units built in BMR kept increasing (except for the drop in 1992, the year of the military coup). Within nine years, BMR had almost one million new housing units constructed.

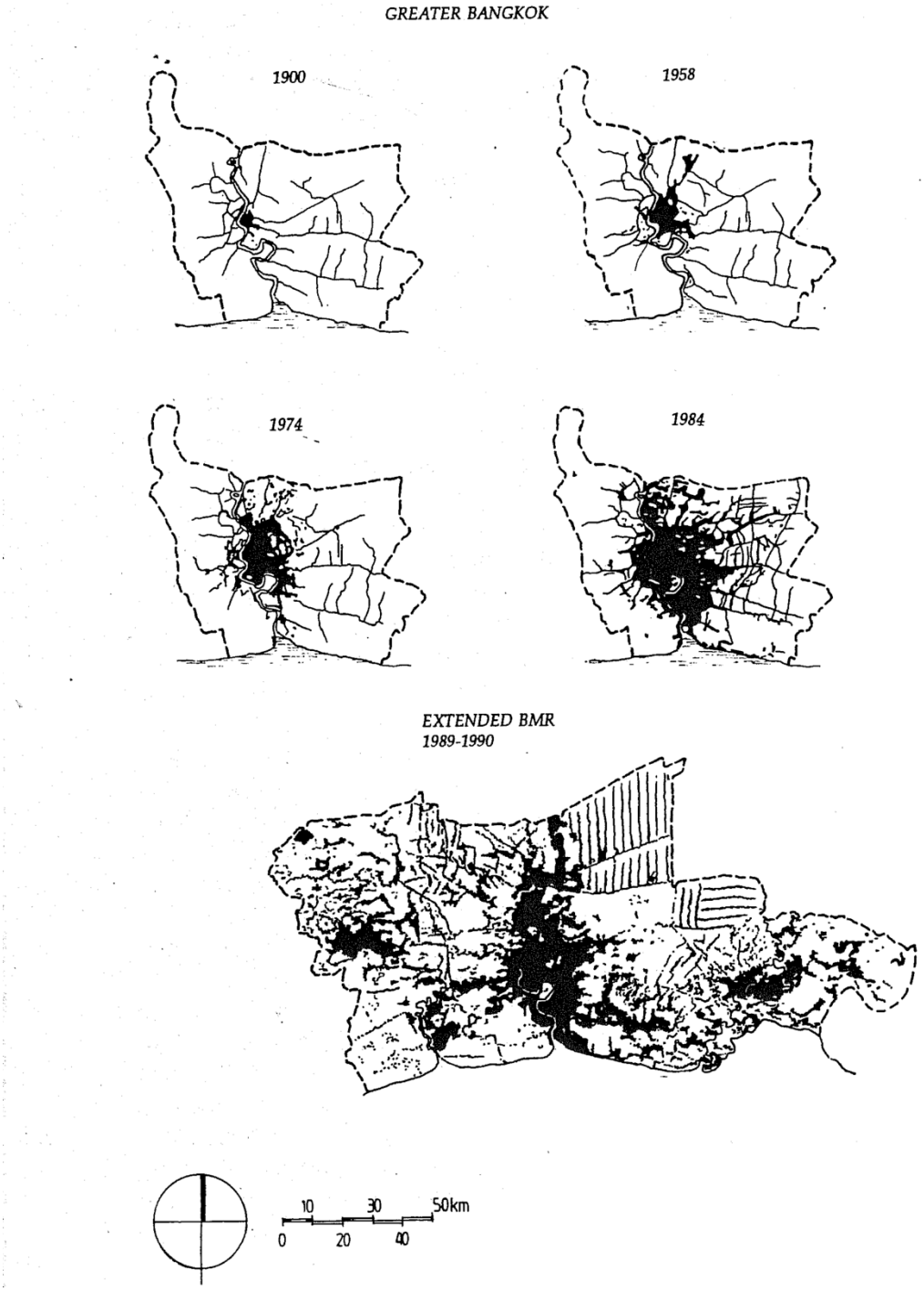
[5] Please see land price from Table 1-1 in Chapter 1 Introduction.

Table 2-1: New Housing Construction in BMR During 1987 – 1996

Year	Self -Built	Developer	Total	Change (%)
1987	22,700	30,653	53,353	N/A
1988	22,276	45,175	67,451	+26.4
1989	22,529	57,502	80,031	+18.7
1990	25,940	76,395	102,335	+27.9
1991	25,275	104,413	129,688	+26.7
1992	23,717	84,284	108,001	-16.7
1993	36,459	97,627	134,086	+24.2
1994	35,150	136,104	171,254	+27.7
1995	32,118	140,301	172,419	+0.7
1996	28,059	138,726	166,785	-3.3
Total	206,718	777,850	984,568	N/A

Source: Government Housing Bank cited in Sheng and Kirinpanu (2000)

Figure 2-8: Growth of the built–up area of Bangkok between 1900 and 1990

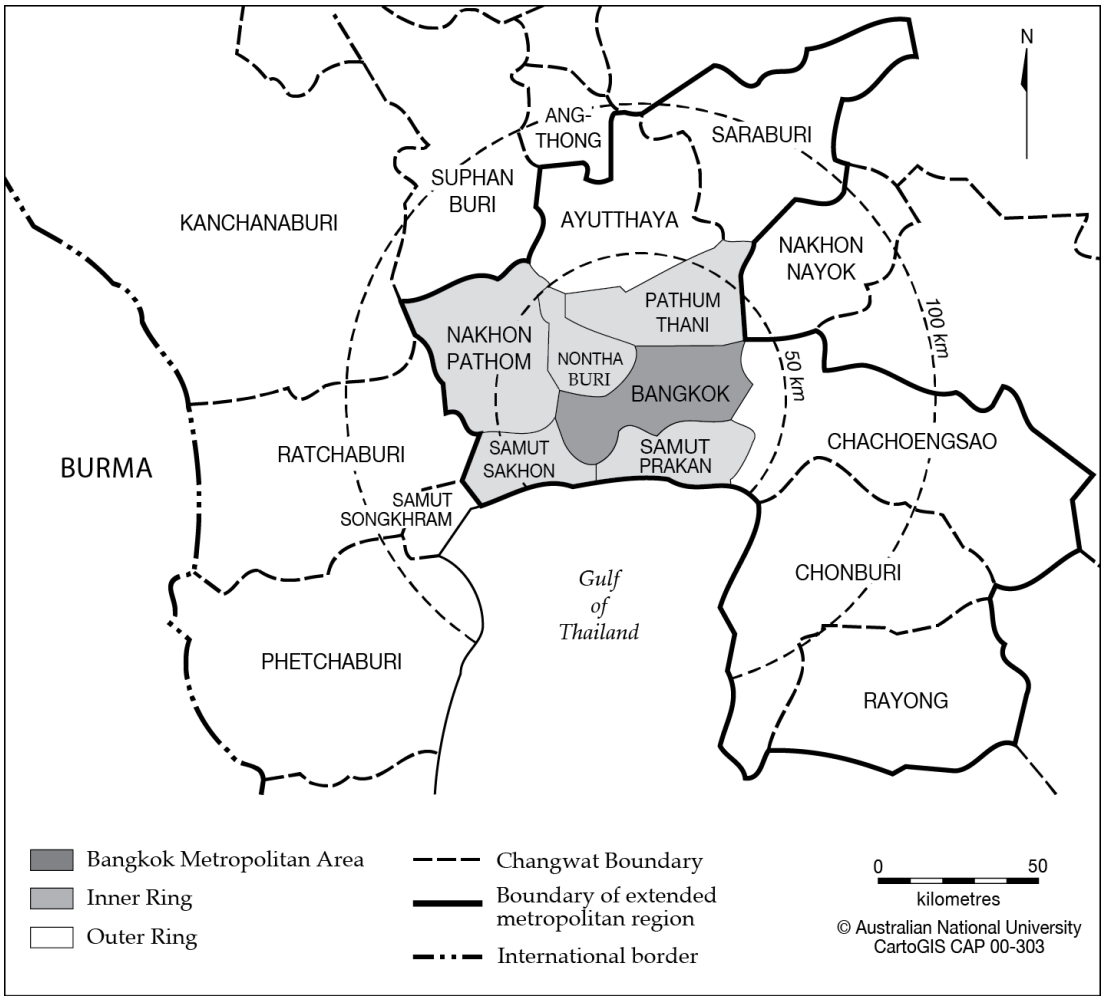


Source: Robinson (1995: 96)

Over two decades of rapid urban expansion spreading outwards from Bangkok city centre, provinces that surrounded Bangkok also rapidly urbanised. As planning authorities saw an essential requirement for rapid expansion, in 1972, the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) was first created, with the city now containing five previously neighbouring provinces within its boundaries:

Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Samut Prakan, Nakhon Pathom, and Samut Sakorn (Panitchapakdi 2000). However, the BMR is only bound in terms of planning administrative and economic policies. Governing administration is still the same, and each province has their own mayor because Thailand does not have regional governments. Establishing the BMR aims to create a general image of how to make planning and policies support this metropolitan area of Bangkok and its vicinities, and surrounded provinces. Figure 2-9 presents the BMR boundary map. While dark grey shows Bangkok's city area, light grey areas shows the fives provinces surrounding Bangkok that are bounded into the BMR. Eventually, Bangkok expanded to the scale of a mega-urban region (Douglass 2000), a phenomenon typical of the region where Bangkok's regional urbanisation was considered critical to its integration with the global economy.

Figure 2-9: Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) Map



Source: The Australian National University (2016)

2.4.1 Bangkok's regional urbanisation

In response to dramatic economic growth, the government planned several mega-projects for the national capital to attract foreign investors and thus, transform Bangkok into a global city. As already explained, this was a process that started much earlier during Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's regime (1958–1963). Sarit had established the National Economic Development Board (NEDB) and Board of Investment (BOI) to stimulate industrial growth, promote foreign investment and to foster economic growth in Thailand as a whole, in line with the American model (Askew 2002).[6] Since then, subsequent governments have consistently proposed grand plans to elevate Bangkok as a world city with a business district and infrastructure developments, such as transportation hubs and telecommunication networks (Douglass and Boonchuen 2006). However, although successive governments proposed mega infrastructure developments, including a new international airport, a deep water harbour, and the Eastern Sea Board (ESB) project, urban planning did not feature as a major concern in the latter part of the twentieth century. The first major project to be completed was the new Bangkok International Airport, Suvarnabhumi, which despite being proposed in 1968 did not open until 2006. Suvarnabhumi is bigger, with greater capacity and, due to improved highways, more conveniently located than the old Bangkok International Airport, which opened for commercial flights in 1924. During the Fifth NESDP (1982 – 1986), the Thai government established the Eastern Seaboard Development Programme (ESB) in order to encourage a decentralisation of industrial and economic activities in Bangkok and to reduce migration number to Bangkok. The ESB aimed at moving industrial development eastwards and to disperse deep–seaport logistics eastward also (Sauwalak 2001), which has led to further development in this area. This project included a new deep water seaport, with enormous industrial parks nearby. The ESB was designed to serve the mushrooming banking and manufacturing centres by providing them with telecommunications and transportation nodes linking Thailand's capital to the rest of the world more effectively (Kittiprapas 2001). The ESB was chosen mainly because of its location,

[6] Later, the NEDB's name was changed to the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)

close to Bangkok and conveniently connected to the Northeastern industrial areas of Thailand. Moreover, it is connected to the Gulf of Thailand, which is the gateway to transfer goods and products. In this regard, industrial development and urbanisation grew eastwards, supplanting metropolitan Bangkok with a megalopolis leading to the establishment of the Extended Bangkok Metropolitan Region (EBMR). The Thai government established the EBMR in 1992 to provide a logistic, industrial and trading centre that could respond to globalising economic demands (*ibid.*). Only a decade after the policies were applied, the EBMR in the 1990s triggered a further extension of Bangkok city, which included three additional provinces: Ayutthaya, Chonburi and Chachoengsao (see location of the plus three provinces in Figure 2-9), thereby bringing them into the existing city under the umbrella of the range of policies proposed for the mega-city. With similar reasons of establishing the BMR, the Thai government was forced to establish EBMR. Furthermore, EBMR also represents a major economic agglomeration area and industrial centre of Thailand. This is because BOI policy is only applied in EBMR and EBMR has facilities supporting economic and industrial activities that other areas do not have. The establishment of the EBMR was not just geared towards ensuring global connectivity for Bangkok, it was also to promote a dispersal of development to other parts of the country (Ayal 1992). But instead of decentralising Bangkok, EBMR not only ended up serving Bangkok city, but also through their own rapid industrialisation and urbanisation along the Bangkok-Chonburi highway corridor found themselves confronted with new kinds of urban development challenges (Shatkin 2004).

What is interesting here is that while most of these projects took at least a few decades to be realised, none of them were completely abandoned and hence they reveal a landscape wearing a perpetual 'development-in-progress' tag with no completion in sight. They are in a sense a reassurance that no project is ever totally abandoned and yet, by existing side by side or superimposed, especially in the absence of clear zoning and no strict urban planning, they tend to convey an image of uncontrolled urbanisation. The

extended mega-urban region thus revealed a new set of concerns that came with half-baked policies of decentralisation as they ended up occupying

> "a spread out and sprawling patterns of homes, industrial plants, office complexes, golf courses, and retail trade shops in scattered and non – contiguous locations throughout the periphery and fridge of the metropolitan area or metropolitan region and along major highways and railroad lines radiating from the central cores…this spatial pattern results from an unplanned and uncontrolled decentralization." (Robinson 1995: 85)

It thus seems that EBMR not only was a result of uncontrolled or unplanned decentralisation but also acted as a catalyst for further forms of uncontrolled urbanisation, reaffirming Bangkok's stereotyped portrayals of a city out of control.

2.4.2 Urbanisation out of control: Rhetoric vs reality

One of the downsides to the flex/flux in the city's development trajectory is the common perception of the city's urbanisation being out of control. This is mainly due to a planning mechanism that perhaps exists, but in most cases is over-ridden by specific project-driven decisions. The very first urban planning act in Thailand, including that of Bangkok, was established in 1952. However, this act does not have a solid plan or an objective of how the urban development trajectories should be managed. The act, regulated by local authorities in each province was only applied to control construction of utilities and buildings. It can be argued that the first urban planning act focussed at urbanisation as a product rather than process. Moreover, the urban planning act was not based on any comprehensive urban plan, and hence did not include any regulations for land development – use control, transportation construction, and utilities service improvement. It was doomed to failure from the beginning as it failed to provide a steer for urban growth. With a narrow focus on construction, there was no foresight into utility provision for newly urbanising areas leading to traffic congestion, lack of water supply, pollution problems, among other issues. In 1957, the government hired the American company, Litchfield, Whiting, Bowne & Associates to create the first comprehensive plan covering Bangkok

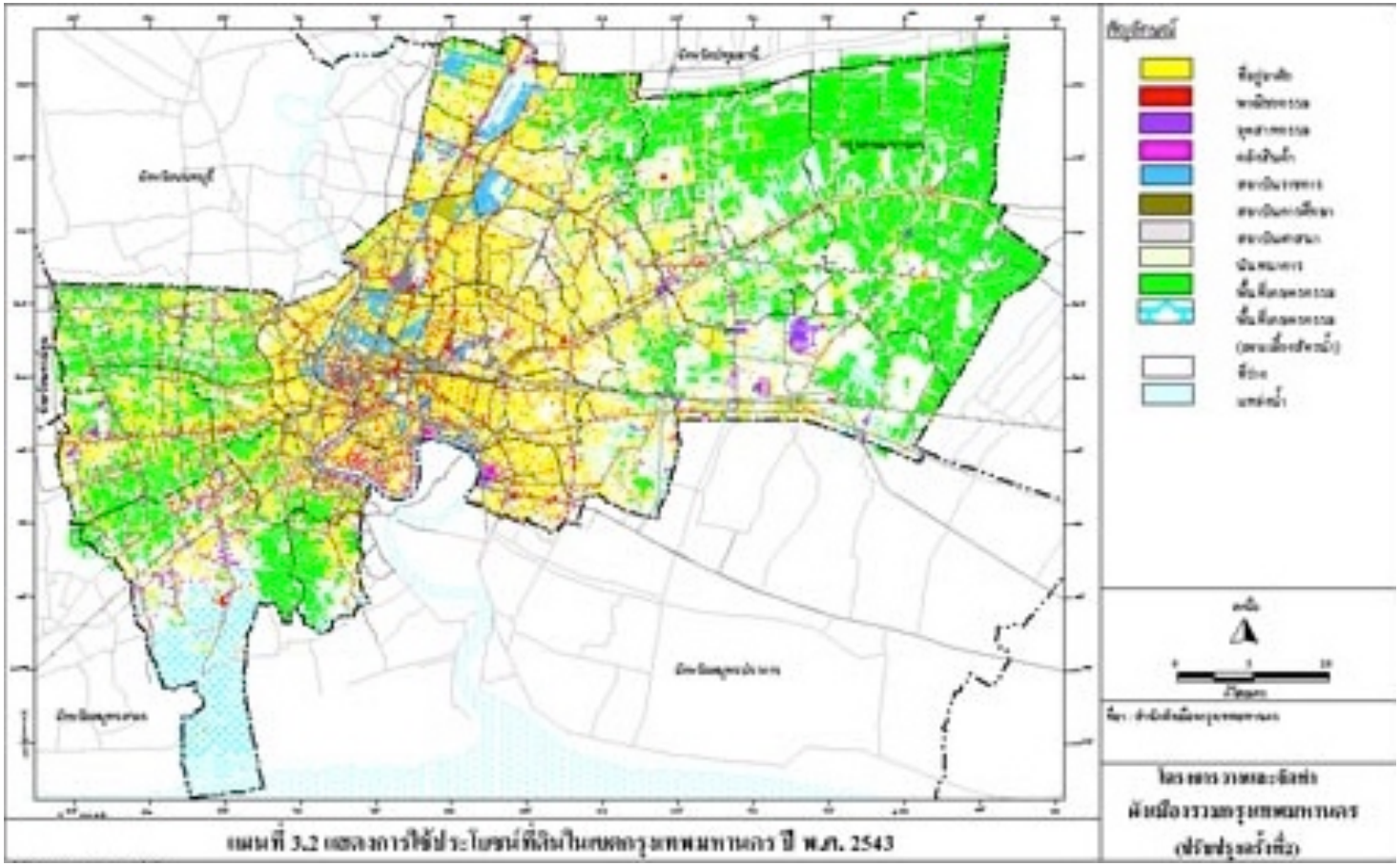
and two of its vicinity provinces - Nonthaburi and Samutprakarn. The plan named 'Greater Bangkok Plan 2533' was comprehensive and included a land use map, a transportation plan and a utilities plan. Unfortunately, this was never implemented as it was claimed that the delay in implementation was because the urban planning act was not compatible with the Greater Bangkok Plan 2533. The government needed to establish a new law supporting this comprehensive urban planning approach. Eighteen years later, in 1975, the Thai government finally announced a revised urban planning act for the implementation of the comprehensive plan. But by then the plan had become outdated but continued to be used by local planners as a prototype to develop comprehensive urban plans on their own. It took the planning authorities another twenty-five years to launch a proper comprehensive urban plan (Figure 2-12) in the year 2000.

Thus, key decisions for a mega-urban region such as the BMR or the EBMR are taken in the absence of a master plan. Equally, there is no single authority responsible for overseeing such matters across the mega-urban region; each province is independently governed (Evers and Koff 2000; Webster 2004; Robinson 1995). This means that there is no mechanism for coordinating any planned development that crosses provincial boundaries. Projects and plans are individually controlled by separate government agencies without any central authority that can veto any unnecessary, overlapping or inappropriate proposals. For example, the urban plans, ESB and EBMR come under the Urban Planning Department overseen by the Interior Ministry, while the expressway construction projects are managed by the Expressway Authority of Thailand, with road construction being the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport.

The result is that the city is freely developed by competing or conflicting interests. When any sense of control interferes with economic growth, the latter almost always prevails. Askew (2002) categorically states that Bangkok has turned out to be an unplanned city when considered in its entirety, because no single effective master plan has ever been implemented. Similar to most large Southeast Asian cities, Bangkok's plan, for a long time, remained only on paper, or as Askew (2002) pointed out, it went no further than an outline sketch. The

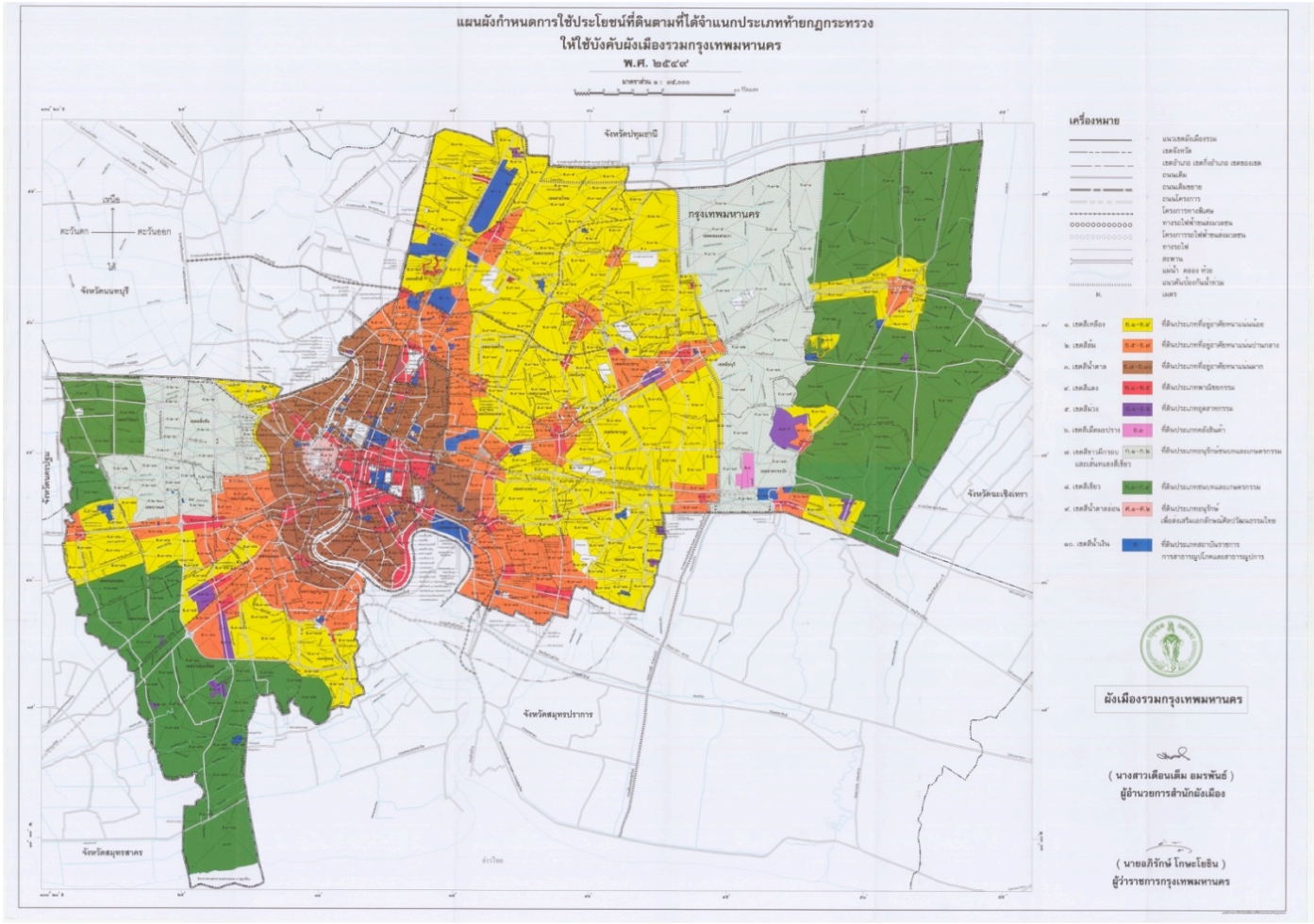
idea within this nominal plan was the development of a polycentric spatial structure across the metropolitan region (McGee and Robinson 1995: XII). Implementation of the urban plan only really started to get off the ground after 2000, but its progress was severely hampered. One reason for the failure to implement a city-wide urban plan is the weak zoning of urban land. As shown in Figures 2-10 and 2-11, the land–use zones are quite large, which suggests that they are arbitrarily drawn rather than legally defined. In fact, the reality is that in the different coloured sections, any prescribed rules or regulations for land-use in these areas are generally flaunted (Phuchinda 2007).

Figure 2-10: Land – use Master Plan of Bangkok in 2000



Source: City Planning Department of Bangkok Metropolitan Administration

Figure 2-11: Land–Use Master Plan of Bangkok in 2006



Source: City Planning Department of Bangkok Metropolitan Administration

In Figure 2-11, for example, in theory the green areas are for residential and agricultural activities located at the edge of Bangkok's geographic territory. The main aim here is to preserve the suburban nature by limiting what can be constructed to control the expansion of the city. However, light industrial units and small non-residential buildings can be built without notice to the planning department, despite this not being the original intention. This has resulted in an unregulated urban sprawl. Further into the city, a similar pattern of unclear land-use zones exists due to poor zoning regulation. This lack of enforced zoning has become one of the city's characteristics, which King (2012) claims, has led to a developmental chaos. He argues that Bangkok's land-use plan added another haphazard layer onto the cityscape. Ironically, it was this weak urban planning that was employed to create a modern and global urban landscape within the BMR and the EBMR. During the economic boom, this lack of zoning meant that land-use development nearly entirely served economic interests, such that built form from the colonial era dotted with temples, shops, houses and old residential buildings mingled with high-rise developments (Douglass and Jones 2008. See Figures 2-12 and 2-13).

Figure 2-12: Expressway, flyover, billboard and high rise buildings sharing spaces in Bangkok.

The top left picture shows skytrain rail mixing in the city, while the top right picture shows a flyover passing the city centre next to high-rise buildings with advertising billboards attached.

The bottom left picture shows advertising posters on a building next to a BTS station near an expressway. The bottom right picture shows decades of crowded superimposition of advertising in a street in Chinatown, one of the oldest parts of Bangkok, and temporary shops occupy footpaths outside commercial buildings.

Source: the researcher and bottom right picture from Ploy (n.d.)

Figure 2-13: Local and global mix overlaying in Bangkok

Source: the researcher and Soginews (n.d.)

With very slow, unclear and weak urban planning unable to counter the unstoppable and swift movement of globalisation, the government has failed to take the lead on the urban plan. In a theme familiar to cities all over, planners push for policies that allow for a globalised, cosmopolitan, economically integrated, and competitive city to thrive. In cities like Bangkok, the plan is so

skeletal and abstract that it is even difficult to contravene, as one is not entirely sure what the proposals are. They are often opaque, inaccessible to the wider public and reveal little in terms of details. In response to Shatkin's (2010) suggestion of questioning the planners to better understand the dynamics of power in globalizing cities, one cannot help but wonder what purpose this would serve when planners carry little power. For, going back to his earlier article, it is clear that 'one defining characteristic of contemporary urban development is the unprecedented privatization of urban and regional planning' (Shatkin 2008: 384). For, we can definitely find some form of 'privatization of planning' in Bankgok, where it is not just ineffective urban planning that has allowed private developers to literally manipulate the city and its peripheries' development agenda. Shatkin (2004) again provides a Bangkok-specific perspective when he analyses the Eastern Seaboard, a region of three provinces forming the outermost fringe of the Extended Bangkok Metropolitan Region, whose rise is indicative of not just a city growing outwards but also specific form of power dynamics spreading from the centre to the periphery, in this case, the emergence of local political bosses, who as businessmen-politicians blur the difference between politicians and developers. What is notable here is that, it was leading developers from Bangkok city who first convinced the government to establish the Eastern Seaboard in order to maximise Thailand's impressive economic growth and the subsequent demand for industrial activities. Thus, developments such as the Eastern Seaboard reveal the commonplace nature of private developers working alongside the government (local and national) to facilitate a specific form of urbanisation, one that supports their own economic interests.

This essentially led to the extended mega-urban region formation of Bangkok, one that was more than an agglomeration economic spillover. In fact, projects such as the Eastern Seaboard and the new airport established by the government to support possible global connectivities triggered a linear peripheral development pattern along the expressways (Sorensen and Okata 2011). Such ribbon developments now stretch beyond 100km from the city centre (Ruland 1996). The ribbon development has largely continued unabated

because it has not been accompanied by plans to create satellite towns as nodal points away from the built up area. Satellite towns provide jobs for at least some residents and those in the near vicinity, taking some pressure off the need for continual expansion of the major city. This has been a feature in other Southeast Asian mega urban regions, as pointed out by Dick and Rimmer (1997). However, in the case of Bangkok while the focus has been on creating a mega-urban region, or more specifically an extended metropolitan region, it is to merely serve specific infrastructure projects such as the Eastern Seaboard and the airport as well as create pockets of global capital concentration/speculation. There is little concern to decongest city, which paradoxically has become more crowded as a result of extending the city out. There is also the issue of having few provisions within the planning process to address everyday infrastructure concerns (Lo and Yeung 1996; Krongkeaw 1996). The large-scale corridor developments have exacerbated access to water, electricity, telephone lines and roads that need to be stretched farther than initially planned. Often due to budgetary constraints, proposals to extend the infrastructure to accompany the spatial outgrowth cannot be realised.

Thus, the aim of globalising Bangkok brought to the fore the issue of expanded metropolitan development. In this pattern, both the core and the periphery become prey to different forms of capital exploitation. Private developers focussed on the vision of Bangkok as a world city constructed 'luxury' buildings on prime real estate in and around the city centre, ones that only the middle and upper classes could afford. Those excluded were forced to seek housing possibilities amidst the urban sprawl that was beginning to define Bangkok's sad state of spatial development (Ruland 1996). Eventually, premium land in the city centre became so scarce and expensive that property developers sought new areas on the periphery, mainly close to the expressways, to increase their chances of making significant profits on their investments. New industrial developments located close to the arteries that fed into the global market and housing for the workers were built close by. This process of linear development along the main road has continued over the past few decades, resulting in series of ribbons radiating out of the city. Planning authorities have noted the ill-

effects of this linear development in terms of high utilities construction cost and long commuting distances causing traffic congestion. Nevertheless, the authorities have not attempted to enforce regulations to prevent this. Instead, they persist with efforts to sustain linear development as seen in their building of the Burapar-Vitee expressway connecting Bangkok to Eastern Seaboard. As already mentioned, such selective infrastructure supported linear developments where there is easy access to roads but perhaps not so much to water and electricity have triggered an increase in land prices and have proven attractive to the city's growing middle classes. The city centre (Figure 2-14), however, remains desirable to many who own condominiums to stay and work during the week, retreating to the peripheries during the weekend. This new lifestyle has resulted in the city centre becoming even more densely built up, while in the peri-urban areas, i.e. the EBMR, fringe expressways stretch through rice fields, interspersed with factories and luxurious gated communities. The alternative for a planned satellite town development catering to a broader social mix (from the lower to the upper classes), as in Jakarta, but also in other places around the world, was never really explored.

Figure 2-14: Bangkok skyline density, high-rise buildings and expressways

Source: researcher

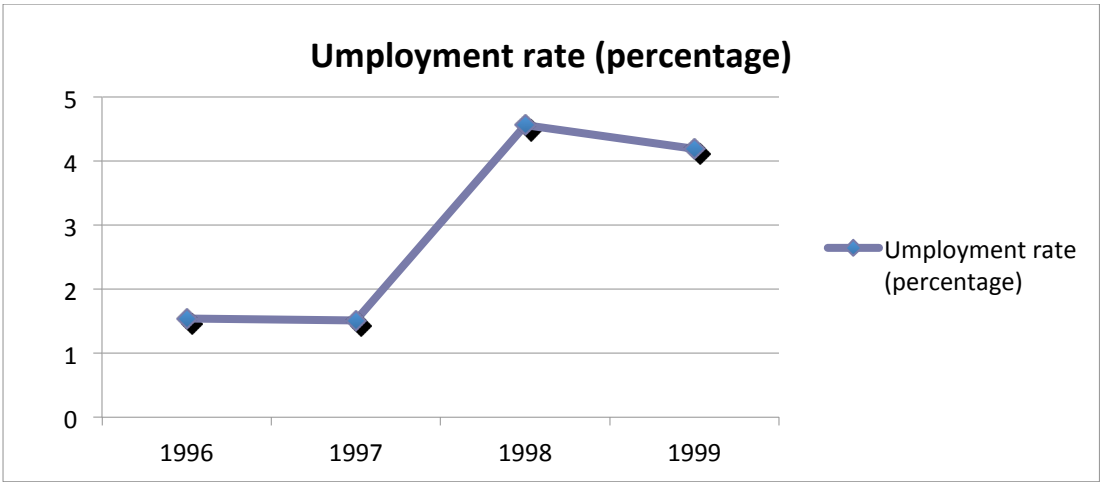
In this context, the reality of the city and its region is in the rhetoric, in that its dramatic growth has triggered polarisation of social classes, exasperating socio-spatial segregation. The city thus becomes a stage to an all familiar scenario that we have witnessed in other cities across Asia and globally: with continual development of the city centre, the poor are displaced as their slums and low-income areas are demolished to make way for globalised commercial developments. As the poor are pushed out, the peculiar nature of the ribbon development means that there is further polarisation taking place in the peripheries. Their only options are to create new squatter settlements 3-5 kilometres away from the main roads, in areas with little connectivity and infrastructure. Their option of commuting every day to the city centre for work is almost nil (where they might have to travel up to 4 hours per day) and hence their only chances of employment are either on the newly built industrial estates in these ribbon developments or as domestic workers in the gated communities. Many are even seen hawking goods and offering services of all kinds along the expressways.

2.4.3 The 1997 financial crisis

By the mid-1990s, despite urbanisation concerns, Bangkok seemed to be firmly on the path to becoming a 'global city' comparable with Singapore, one of the most commonly invoked cities in the region as a global city. For the Thai government, being a global city may not mean securing a position alongside the top roster of Alpha world cities such as Tokyo, New York or London, a classification made popular by the Globalisation and World Cities project. What the Thai government is doing is to position Bangkok into a global space and market, leading to a global flow, one that is reflected in both city spaces – network landscapes such as mega urban regions, and capital flow – Foreign Direct Investment to industrial activities and economic activities (Kelly and McGee 2003). Having a cityscape that is linked to the global market and capital flow seems to have been crucial in the city's pursuit of global city status. However, the economic collapse across Southeast Asia in 1997 hit Thailand particularly hard and affected the city's global city aspirations and its related urban development plans quite badly (Keawthep and Nutalaya 2000). In July

1997, the Thai government had to devalue the baht, because real-estate development outstripped demand and agricultural and manufactured goods for export were in sharp decline. As a result of this devaluation, short-term investors immediately shifted their capital to other countries. Bangkok's economy ground to a halt, with many building and infrastructure projects left incomplete, as well as the financial and manufacturing sectors being hit hard. As a result, unemployment soared. As shown in Figure 2-15, the unemployment rate increased from 1.5 percent to 4.5 percent between 1996 and 1998.

Figure 2-15: Unemployment Rate During 1996 – 1999



Source: Bank of Thailand (2014)

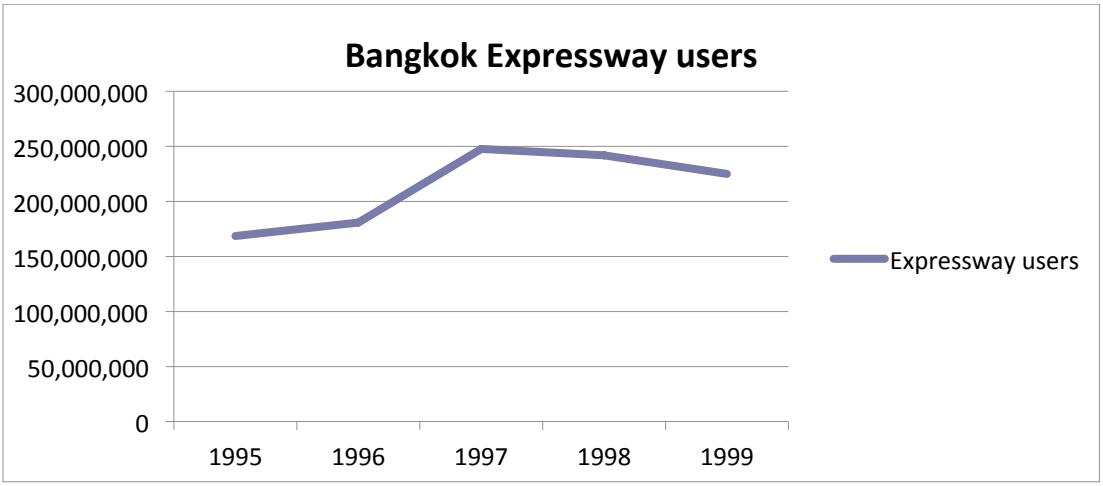
There were 120,000 manufactoring jobs lost and 100,000 were laid off from the financial sector (Webster 2005). Housing construction fell from 180,000 units in the mid-1990s to less than 40,000 units after 1997 (Sopon 2002 cited in Douglass and Boonchuen 2006) and over 200 high–rise buildings remained unfinished (Herron 2001), abandoned by bankrupt developers or owners. Moreover, 350,000 housing units in Bangkok were unoccupied by the end of 1997 (Douglass and Boonchuen 2006) and the office vacancy rate in Bangkok doubled from 20 per cent to 40 per cent between 1997 and 1999. By mid-1998, 1,300 factories had shut down (Askew 2002). However, whilst the centre of Bangkok lost 120,000 manufaturing jobs, there were 57,000 new jobs created in the peri–urban area (EBMR). That is, although the crisis led to rapid deindustralisation from Bangkok's core, there was a decentralisation to the outskirts, where efficient manufacturing and export–oreinted industries sprang up and provided jobs to offset those lost in the city

centre. This was matched by economic activity and construction work flowing out to the EBMR (Webster 2004).

In the aftermath of 1997 crisis, there was a flurry of scholarship eager to sprout platitudes on lessons learned. For instance, Renaud (2003) looked at the implications of the crisis on the real-estate market, and oddly concluded that the volatility of the Asian real estate market has had costly repercussions for the country, and oddly, the only way of countering this was to continue with the development of financial and real estate market infrastructure, albeit one that is done with the complicity of the government. A more restrained analysis is provided by Glassman (2007) who found that the paths out of the crisis was conditioned by political alliances and accumulation strategies, one that was not very different from what existed before the crisis. Specifically, as he reminds us, much of the manufacturing investment had been concentrated in Bangkok's peri-urban areas, reflecting the longstanding dominance of its agglomerations and their gradual extension into the surrounding countryside, this being part of the extended metropolitan region phenomenon. He found that this pattern had been retained more or less in the period of recovery from the crisis. Thus, the government continued to favour deindustrialisation of the centre to the peripheries, and favoured mega-infrastructure projects in the city centre instead of manufacturing, launching the Bangkok SkyTrain or the BTS in 1999 as a prominent development scheme to improve the city's transportation woes. At the same time, the government kept promoting developments on the periphery, particularly in the Eastern Seaboard project to the east, by not shelving them and including them in the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) (1997-2001). This included forming a transportation hub in the BMR and EBMR, including railway improvements, a new international airport, and building motorways to link industrial centres to the sea and airports. The government hoped that such spatial fix strategies would continue to help Bangkok's economic recovery and stimulate growth through export-oriented industrialisation. However, Webster (2005) finds that there was a shift in the post-crisis period as the emphasis was not so much on export-oriented industrialisation but on a consumer-driven economy, as seen

from the government's decision to increase consumer expenditure and reduce the contribution of exports to growth prospects. This trajectory was reflected in the urban environment as seen in the rise of spaces of consumption providing wider ranges of goods and services in retailing complex sites such as Siam Paragon, Central World, Siam Discovery and MBK, with the city centre. The reality is somewhat in between Webster's (2005) and Glassman's (2007) argument where the city centre was deliberated reimagined as a source of creative economy attracting specific kinds of global investors, while the peripheries were carefully managed through a process of (un)planning to house the export-oriented industries. This meant that mega-urban regionalisation of Bangkok continued in the post-crisis years with the government introducing schemes to sustain this form of growth. This also explains why despite a decline of expressway users in Bangkok from 1997-99 (Figure 2-16), government chose to invest in road network improvements in the BMR, especially approving the construction of two mega expressway projects.

Figure 2-16: Number of Bangkok Expressway Users During 1995 – 1999

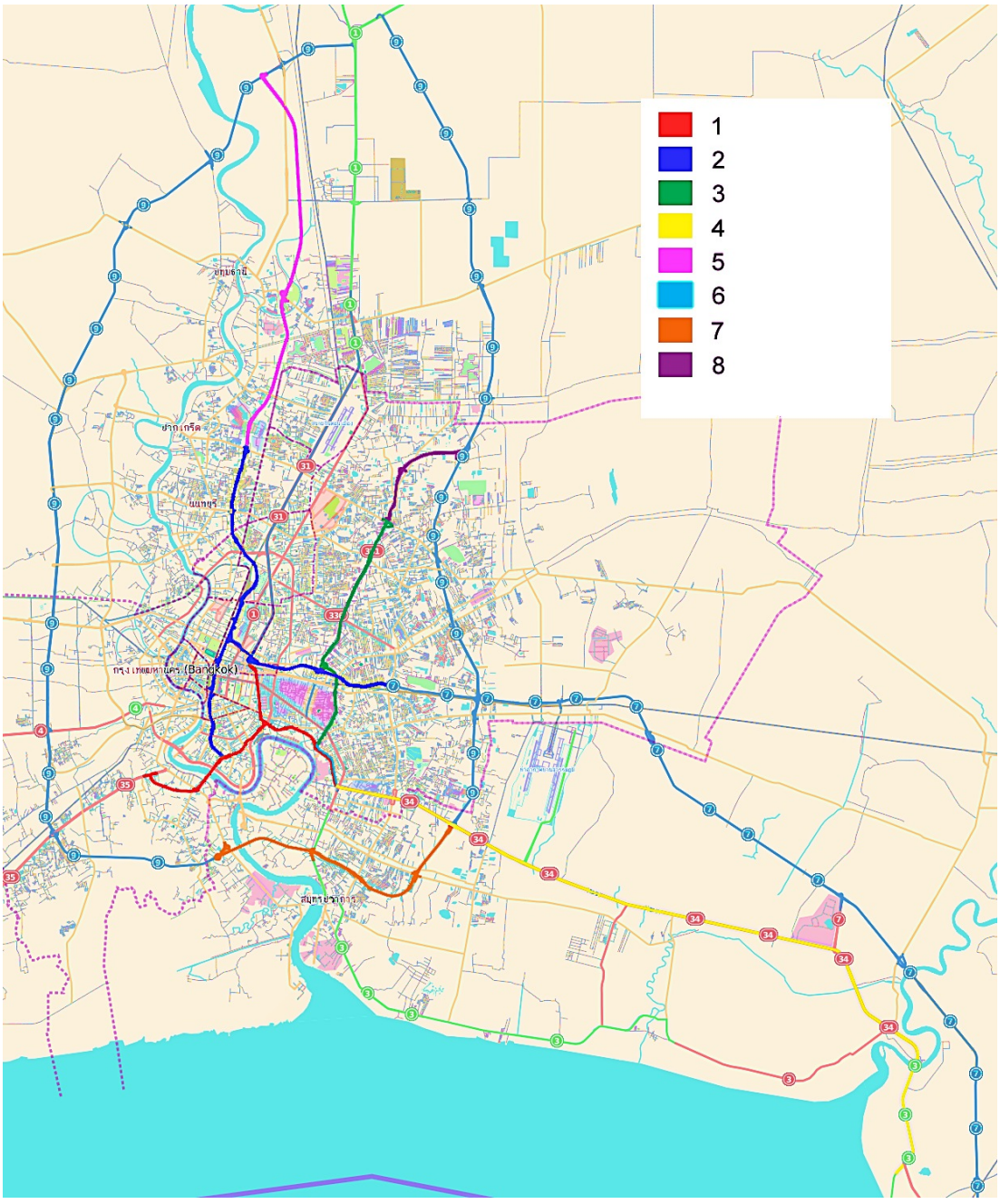


Sources: Department of Policies and Planning, Expressway Authority of Thailand (2013)

One is the Audorn-Rataya Tollway, which now connects the city centre's edge to the northern periphery of Bangkok. This tollway was built to relieve heavy traffic in the northern part of the BMR and connect the CBD to Vipawadee and Pahonyothin, two business district locations outside of the inner city. The first half of the Audorn-Rataya Tollway (Figure 2-17) opened in 1998 and was completed in 1999. The other project was the Burapar-Vitee Expressway (Figure 2-17), which now

connects the CBD to the eastern part of the BMR and Chonburi Province, part of the Eastern SeaBoard. This was constructed to ease traffic congestion on Sukhumvit Road, the traditional surface route between Bangkok and the eastern seaboard. This expressway opened in 2000.

Figure 2-17: Audorn-Rataya Tollway (number 5) shows in pink and Burapar-Vitee Expressway (number 4) shows in yellow line on the map



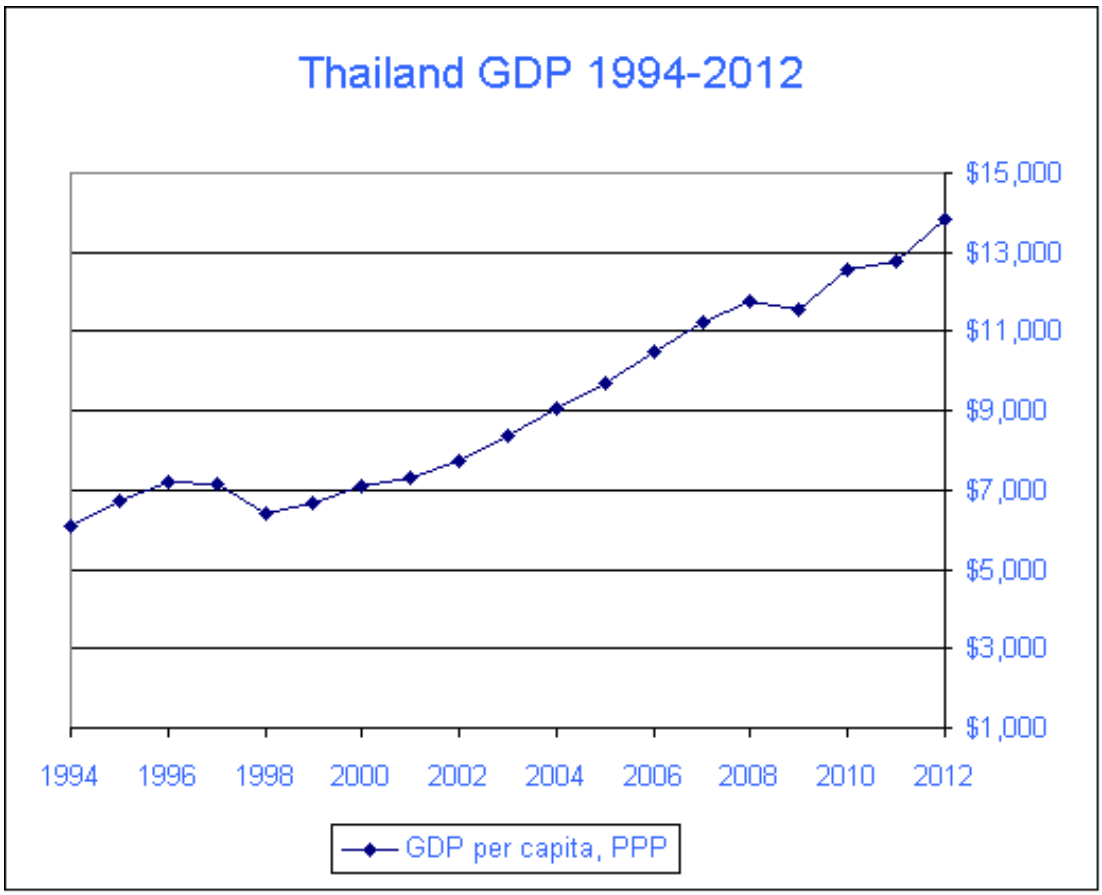
Source: Wikipedia (2016)

The government thus developed a peculiar understanding of what was essential infrastructure to a city recovering from an acute economic crisis, one that relied on a spatial fix (Glassman 2007). Without much foresight, this emphasis sustained the regionalisation of Bangkok at a scale not dissimilar to its pre-crisis growth, but one that came with a series of social challenges that made such decisions look ill-conceived and inappropriate.

2.5 Post-crisis

Despite political instability and slow government action, the Thai economy has, for the most part, continued to improve. Figure 2-18 shows that GDP per capita of Thailand grew a few years after the 1997 economic crisis. The upward trend of GDP is apparent, dropping only two points during 2009 and 2011, when there was political unrest in the streets of Bangkok, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. But the GDP managed to recover once this violence abated.

Figure 2-18: GDP per capita of Thailand from 1994 – 2012



Sources: World Bank (n.d.)

It is now well known that the crisis lasted for a couple of years and by 1999, Bangkok's economy had returned to a slow positive growth, initially at a slower rate of 3 to 5 per cent (1999-2000), rising to an excess of 6 per cent by 2003 (Webster 2005). In the post crisis era, it was not financial instability that caused concern, but the resulting political situation both nationally and at city level, having important bearings on urban development policies and projects. In this context, politics replaced economics in the daily headlines with urban development being shaped more by political factors than economic necessities or state-led projects. It is important to understand the political circumstances in this era. From the birth of Bangkok in the late 1700s to 1997, the old elites have played an important role in governing and developing the city. In 1997, their traditional significance was challenged. Economic downfall weakened trust in the old Thai elites. A sense of despondency that pervaded in Thailand following the economic crisis forced them to look elsewhere for someone who could not only boost the country's economy but also enable it through a democratic process. Important allies to the old elites such as the middle classes were beginning to question the argument of relying on dictatorship to maintain political stability, and it was by combining their support with the rural vote bank that Thaksin Shinawatra was able to construct his electoral victory in 2001 (Englehart 2003; Sirisumphan 2002). He also led a campaign that resisted the prevailing sense that only a neoliberal orthodoxy that restricted state spending could enable economic recovery (Glassman 2010). Chapter 1 has already provided an overview of the rise and fall of Thaksin's fortunes in a short period from 2001 to 2006 when an upper middle class and elite supported military coup deposed his government from power. It not only returned the country to an earlier political era that oscillated between democracy and dictatorship, but also restored the ambivalent Thai-style democracy to the centre stage once again. As a result, Thaksin's carefully developed plan for economic recovery through spatial fix suffered a setback. There were inordinate delays to all major projects as the Cabinet and Parliament were continuously reconstituted, and government agencies were forever presenting the projects and policies repeatedly for approvals. For example, the five-year annual Bangkok comprehensive urban plan was delayed for nearly three years from 2010 to

2013. Since 2000, the Bangkok Planning Authority has a system of preparing four-year comprehensive plans. The first plan was applied in 2000, the second in 2006 and the latest plan in 2010. As a result, the old urban plan (2006-2010) continued to be used in that 3-year interim, one that was clearly outdated and incapable of addressing the city's growth challenge. Planners during this period were forced to keep adjusting the plan to address the growth that had already taken place. This kind of reactive planning became the order of the day, allowing developers and speculators as well as a complicit set of planners to easily manoeuvre the old plan to meet their own set of narrow development gains. For example, the zones for a green belt in the 2006-2010 plan has since been reduced and some parts were changed into residential and commercial zones in the 2013-2017 plan. In fact, the quick economic recovery that took place amidst political instability and non-action from the government side triggered this kind of vested urban development agenda. Thus, not only is the plan following existing development, but planning announcements with just enough detail, such as key residential projects and their locations and where road infrastructure will take place, provide sufficient clues for the private developers to make decisions on their next speculation.

Through a process of carefully manipulated planning (where there was just enough planning, not too much planning), private developers shaped the recovery of the BMR, assuming greater control of its urban development agenda. Housing developers returned to the scene in two forms. The first involved identifying new forms of housing marketing targeting the middle classes who had weathered the storm. Thus, you have Land&House, one of the leading real estate companies in Thailand, who introduced the notion of fully furnished housing into the BMR housing market. Clearing targeting the rise of middle classes as consumers in the post-crisis period, the idea of having a fixed cost and clear budget appealed to this social group. Land&House thus found themselves pioneering a new trend that helped this company that had been badly hit during the crisis reinvent itself. Leading companies such as Sansiri and Pruksa who had a large share of the housing market in the BMR concentrated on particular opportunities opened by the state-investment in mega-infrastructure

projects such as the BTS SkyTrain. By rallying planners to their side, these developers ensured that planning regulations did not impeded and even acceded to their proposals for high-density redevelopment around BTS's new train stations (see Figure 2-19 and Figure 2-20). Again, emphasising a commodification of the housing sector, the condominiums that became the mainstay of these developments were sought after by the upper middle classes and had a huge sway in the way the BTS was eventually reimaged as a travel option for the middle classes rather than a public transport catering to all sections of the society. This is covered in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Figure 2-19: Picture shows high–rise buidings along the BTS line

Source: Researcher

Figure 2-20: Picture shows high–rise buildings along the BTS line

Source: Researcher

Planning policies were written to allow the construction of high-rises along the BTS line, with a more concentrated set of developers (who have survived the crisis) taking over a specific form of housing market, i.e. high-rise residential buildings. As Table 2-2 shows, recovery has been slow over a fifteen-year

period, one that has been deterred by the political violence of 2010. But the major concern here is that it has been triggered by a form of urbanisation that privileges new forms of exclusivity and exclusion, attempting to not just restore the city to its pre-1997 glory but with renewed forms of polarisation.

Table 2-2: High–Rise Residential Building Construction during 1997–2013

Year	Developers	Buildings	Units
1997	236	285	47,067
1998	111	129	21046
1999	31	53	7639
2000	24	60	5750
2001	14	21	4561
2002	24	33	5896
2003	34	50	7115
2004	48	60	8057
2005	60	81	10234
2006	61	103	13717
2007	63	93	15321
2008	81	198	24605
2009	108	220	28817
2010	111	278	39793
2011	84	183	29055
2012	99	177	28949
2013	95	227	36358

Source: Real Estate Business Support Agency, Department of Land (2016)

2.6 Conclusion

McGee's (1967) seminal text *The Southeast Asian City* set the trend for theorising the city in a region that is essentially a post-War geopolitical construct. While much of the scholarship framing it as a Third World city are now redundant, these cities do not yield so easily to alternative framings either, including that of global/globalising cities or even a convergence between the two. This has been the biggest challenge for scholars seeking to conceptualise a city in Southeast Asia, not to mention its heterogeneity that compels us to look for differentiated natures of the Southeast Asian city rather than similarities. Also, the dominance of what Bunnell and Maringanti (2010) refer to as metro-centricity within this discourse, has created an unnecessary new pecking-order of cities within the region (Goh and Bunnell 2013). The prejudices resulting from these debates pose discomfort for scholars working on specific cities in the region. This dilemma is symptomatic for Bangkok where efforts to theorise it as a Southeast Asian city sits awkwardly against a body of literature examining it for its specificity (historically, geographically, culturally, politically). This chapter began by reviewing this tension to particularly highlight the challenges in theorising a city like Bangkok. Many are insufficient in clarifying the complex nature of the city's urban transformation, which has at one level been due to its periodic political shifts; its foundation as a sacred/royal city to late-nineteenth and early twentieth century years of self-colonisation and subsequent decades of alternating military and democratic regimes.

This political instability in fact has played a major role in shaping the city's growth, where despite its economic fortunes remaining on an upward swing for the most part (except briefly during the years of the financial crisis), its spatial trajectory has left a lot to be desired. Even though much of Bangkok-specific literature portraying the city as messy, chaotic, in flux (Radovic 2004, King 2012) might be justified, there is more to this reality than the rhetoric of an urbanisation that is out of control. Initial revelations, such as the lack of a rigorous planning process and the reckless speculation by private developers, might seem to perpetuate stereotypes and state the obvious, and yet this trajectory of the plan following development, needs to be acknowledged and

addressed. It explains to a large extent the city's growth pattern, not only as an extended metropolitan region, but also its specific form of ribbon development along key infrastructure corridors. While the elites and the middle classes have been key actors in, if not driving, at least benefitting from this development dynamic, the intense popularisation of Thai politics with the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001 has challenged this hegemony with its own knock-on effect on Bangkok's urban development agenda. Essentially, it has put the city in a freeze where decisions are made on a project-by-project basis, thus forcing the city's important social groups such as the middle classes into a survival mode. Against a continued context of planning yielding to speculative development, further exasperating an increasingly polarised landscape, a new light needs to be cast on the historical agency of those associated with such decisions, i.e. the elites and the middle classes. The latter are particularly interesting as amidst the opportunities of economic prosperity, they find themselves politically battling to secure their interests within twenty-first century's new era of Thai-style democracy. This significantly shapes the way they engage with the city's growth and development, not only as citizens, but also as producers and consumers.

Chapter 3 Politics of the Thai middle class

Ever since Aristotle argued that "the best run polity occurs where the middle class is large" and that democracies are safer where the middle class is more numerous and has a greater share in government (cited in Lipset and Bendix 1967: 1-2), sociologists have investigated the role of the middle class in sustaining democratic politics in modern societies. In the context of 20th democracy, this emerged essentially as a debate between Lipset's (1960) *Political Man* and Wright Mills' (1956 [2000]) *Power Elite*. While Lipset follows an Aristotelian position in believing that democracy flourishes in largescale industrial nation-states wherein a majority middle class exists, Mills adopts a more cautious Weberian tone in clarifying that one cannot assume the presence of a middle class majority, as the old middle class (the capitalist industrial middle class) is replaced by a new middle class (white collar, technocratic and bureaucratic), the latter is salaried and hence locked into a bureaucratic power structure (Glassman 1995, 1997).

Nevertheless, an Aristotelian viewpoint of a (new) middle class creating a significant social structure, supportive of democracy, re-emerged as a powerful argument in the 1990s when several pro-democracy movements rose across the world to topple long-running authoritarian regimes, demanding the establishment of a bourgeois democracy. Thus, in the case of Thailand, when a military coup overthrew a fledgling democratic government in 1991, it led to demonstrations and protests in 1992, supposedly led by the middle class, ejecting successfully, not only the junta but also ensuring the consolidation of democracy (Englehart 2003; Girling 1996; Yoshifumi 2008; Piriyarangsan and Phongpaichit 1993). However, as Englehart (2003) shows, these protests cannot be seen as an outright pursuit of democracy, but more as a dissatisfaction with aspects of the authoritarian state, mostly around corruption. With strong reservations as to whether the Thai middle class is intrinsically pro-democracy, he believes that even though many members of the middle class might be in favour of a democratic government, others are nervous about their capacity to make good public policy and are in general wary of political parties, and

preferring military leadership. While in many instances the middle class maintains a progressive political stance, acting as a significant democratic force over several periods of political change, at moments of threat to their own economic interests they capitulate towards conservatism and throw their weight behind maintaining the status quo (of authoritarian regimes). Yet, Koo (1991) cautions that simply characterising their politics as incoherent or inconsistent is unsatisfactory, as he finds through his analysis of the South Korean middle class that their role in the democratisation process as complex and variable, in part because of its internal heterogeneity, and in part because of shifting political conjunctures in the transition to democracy:

> The role of the middle classes in democratisation is fluid and variable, not necessarily because of their inherently inconsistent class interest but because the democratisation process is a complex and protracted process and because different segments of the middle class respond to this political change differently. The transition from authoritarian rule is composed of a series of different "moments" or conjunctures, each of which raises different issues, a different form of conflicts, and a shifting balance of power among classes. Responses to these changing political contexts varied not only between the working class and the middle class, but also among different segments of the middle class. In general terms, the Korean middle classes have acted as a progressive democratic element in political transitions but the specific meanings and goals of democracy they projected differed significantly…. (p. 486)

This ambivalence is seen, not only across Southeast Asia, but more widely. In Latin America, it is now clear that the middle class were for a long time quite content with a stable authoritarian regime, provided they ensured efficient bureaucracy (Rueshemeyer et al. 1992). In China, there is no clear evidence of the emerging new middle class being desirous of radical political change (Chen and Lu 2011). Within Southeast Asia, given the differentiated nature of the transition to democracy across several countries, the middle class response is shaped by the changing political and economic contexts in the respective countries. Given this background overview, the purpose of this chapter is to probe further into the more specific aspects of Thai middle class politics, not only in response to current political instability, but also to establish a more

historical understanding of essentially how they arrived at where they are today. It also follows Koo's (1991) suggestion of not looking at the politics of the middle class as one that simply shifts between democracy and authoritarianism, but rather pay attention to the series of different moments or conjunctures that influenced their decision – whether to support a military coup, endorse an unelected government or rally together in restoring democracy (at least semi-democracy, or what is specifically known as Thai-style democracy). While this was mostly due to the fundamental reason of self-preservation, there are broader socio-political implications to this constantly shifting position, influencing not only the way their illiberalism contends with the nation's politics, but also given their predominantly urban profile, their engagement with a city like Bangkok's urban development agenda.

3.1 A genealogy of the Thai middle class

The rise of the modern form of the Thai middle class is generally attributed to the Bowring Treaty of 1855 when economic growth resulting from expanded trade coupled with education reform, which created a space for middle class nurturing, mostly encompassing merchants, bureaucrats and intellectuals. In fact, this middle class was deliberately created by Siamese King Rama V, or King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) as part of a self-colonisation strategy through not only educational opportunities but also the introduction of employment possibilities within a new economic system (Laothamathas 1993a). Generally referred to as the old middle class, its members benefited from the provision of a westernised state education, but eventually played a central role in the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932. While largely it might corroborate the general thesis of middle class support of a strong authoritarian state, their participation in this particular revolution stemmed from specific reasons, including their objection to the introduction of a salary tax as well as the need for greater reforms. Yet, the truth of the matter is that the middle class were crucial for the stability of the military regime as they were kept satisfied through continued educational and employment opportunities, especially during the reign of Field Marshal Sarit, who launched the national development scheme in 1958 to particularly target the middle class. Anderson (1977) in his

analysis of the social and cultural aspects of the October 1976 coup traces its roots back to the 1960s when the growth of a 'new' middle class was abetted by the outpouring of American (and Japanese) capital in Thailand, a crucial ally in the wake of the Vietnam War, and generated an American-style consumption driven boom in the 1960s. It is therefore not surprising that the middle class to emerge during these decades was as closely tied to the Thai state apparatus as it was to foreign capital. As he explains, there is a whole complex of resentments and frustrations among what he refers to as the new bourgeois strata that led to their support of the 1973 Student Revolution (who were not only disillusioned with lack of employment opportunities but were also demanding a constitution and respect for civil liberties). However, the resulting three years of fragile democracy was disrupted as much by the global oil crisis adversely affecting Thailand (the country witnessed double-digit inflation) at the end of the Vietnam War resulting in the withdrawal of American capital. Thus, despite their horizontal solidarity, the middle class favoured setting aside the mayhem of democratic politics and were desirous instead of the political stability of a military regime and supported the October 1976 coup (Morell 1976; Girling 1977; Bell 1978).

One can only follow Koo's (1991) subtle argument that rather than viewing the shifting loyalties of the middle class from authoritarian rule to a democratic government as a pendulum swinging between opportunistic politics (there is certainly an element of this, but not the only one), we need to see it as a more complex series of issue-specific reactions where their positions were determined by a conflict or crisis at hand, and what kind of power relations were readily accessible to them. This is perhaps the best way of explaining why the Thai middle class endured 17 military coups up to 1991 before choosing to prominently participate in the pro-democracy movement that ensued in 1992. This initial portrayal of the democratisation process as one that was largely spearheaded by the Bangkok middle class is now a contested argument, as scholars acknowledge the oversimplification behind such an assumption (Albritton and Thawilwadee 2002; Eawsriwong 2010; Sathiniramai et al. 2012). However, one has to acknowledge the fickle nature of middle class politics when

following the 1997 financial crisis (where the middle class again bore the brunt of the economic meltdown), the Thai middle class, especially those residing in Bangkok not only found themselves clamouring for state interventionist policies safeguarding their interests (even if it meant the outright pursuit of conservative, neoliberal politics) but were also extremely wary of the rise to power of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001, whose party promised populist welfare schemes aimed mostly at the rural peasantry with few sops to the middle class. The 2006 coup that overthrew Shinawatra and the subsequent wave of instability that has rocked Thailand since then is suggestive of what Glassman (2010) refers to as a slide towards "post-democracy", driven in part by the interests of a strong Bangkok based middle class, one that cannot consistently get all that it wants out of conventional parliamentary politics.[7]

All this assessment of the Thai middle class comes with a certain amount of discomfort over the sweeping homogenisation of a social group that encompasses a broad spectrum of members from a small ruling elite and a growing 'mass' at the lower end, comprising mostly rural peasantry. Scholars such as Funatsu and Kagoya (2003) are reluctant to use the term 'middle class' as they believe it can be attributed to only a narrow segment, i.e., intellectuals, and prefer instead to use the term 'middle strata' displaying a diversity of class characteristics, and with no well-defined political orientation. They argue that the social consciousness of the Thai middle class is produced more by "a peculiar pattern of "intermingling" among different social strata in the cities, which permitted intensive upward social mobility from the lower rungs of city dwellers", against a rather limited upward social mobility from the rural sector (*ibid*.: 244). But once they reach a certain class destination by attaining an

[7] Within this context, what also needs acknowledging is the urbanisation of the Thai middle class. The rising share of Bangkok's GDP in relation to Thailand (50 per cent) was matched by an increasing percentage of a 'middle-class' employment concentration (30 per cent) (Funatsu and Kagoya 2003). As the major beneficiary of an urban-centred development (and specifically a Bangkok-centred development process), a common viewpoint is that the 'middle class' that rose in the 1990s championed a form of political consciousness advantageous to its own class interests and sought to keep that of rural Thailand out. This is not entirely true and comes with a qualification: it is not the middle classes in Bangkok, because of their urban-centred view who are opposed to the political participation of farmers but a segment of highly educated people, who are reluctant to give unrestrained support to elections as democratic procedures (*ibid*.).

occupation that defines them as members of the middle classes, inter-class differences based on educational credentials solidify and become very pronounced, thus dividing the empirical category of the middle classes into an (elite) upper white-collar stratum and lower middle strata. Following this argument, instead of applying the more popular analytical distinction between the 'old' and the 'new' middle class (based on their consumption pattern, politics, employment profile etc.), this thesis acknowledges and adopts the broader distinction between the upper and lower middle classes in investigating the politics of Bangkok's middle classes.

3.2 The Thai Middle class: More than a paradox

Most popular portrayals of the Thai middle class focus on their constant state of dilemma. Thamjai (2002), in Weekly Nation, a local Thai newspaper described the middle class as a dilemma, a quandary that arises not only from the difficulty of defining and categorising it, but also from the challenge of such a characterisation. This is not unlike the broader challenges of clearly pinning the boundaries of the middle class in general (Abercrombie and Urry 1983; Yodkamonsat 2005; Tantuwaanich 2007). Similar to the rise of the middle class in the era of industrial capitalism, the middle class emerged as broad in Thailand during the nineteenth century, with the influence of western capitalism in the growth of the Thai economy. Covering broad educational and employment spectrum, scholars have acknowledged the fallacy of speaking of one single middle class and instead refer to it in plural terms: the middle classes (Ockey 1999). And yet, recognising the heterogeneity has offered little clarification to what remains a problematic social class. In an attempt to bring some semblance of perspicuity, scholars have tried to organise sub-classifications, the most prominent being the old and the new middle class. Following a Weberian argument, Ockey (2004) remarks on the old middle class being driven by status comprising mostly of small business owners and government officers, and describes the new middle class as a consumer class emerging with the affluence of the late 20th century globalised capitalist economy. Even though this broad binary has proved more useful than most quantitative efforts to categorise the middle class socio-economically through

occupation, education and income, as argued in earlier, we need to go beyond a consumption and status-based definition that categorises in a way the old and new tend to rely on. While their politics at one level is driven by their desire to protect their consumerist lifestyle, to merely reduce this explanation to a paradox is to miss the rather murky rationale of middle class politics. This chapter thus calls for us to go beyond the arguments of scholars such as Embong (2001) and Eawsriwong (2009a) who stress the paradoxical nature of the middle class, especially one that keeps swinging between democracy and dictatorship. In order to unravel the nuances, the following section draws attention to the specific nature of the Thai-style democracy, one that has a clear bearing on the complex and difficult-to-explain nature of middle class positioning vis-à-vis Thai politics.

3.2.1 Being middle class in a Thai-style democracy

What is often missing in the scholarship of the Thai middle classes is a genealogical understanding of its evolution, one that dates back to the foundations of Thailand and Bangkok. During the nineteenth century, hemmed in by the rise of colonialism all around (Britain taking control of Burma, France capturing Cambodia and Laos, the latter from Siam), King Rama V took the crucial decision of self-colonisation the country and its capital city were transformed to adopt European characteristics (see Chapter 2 for more on this). This included the nurturing of an educated middle class, which was developed as an ally of the monarchy and the old elites. The middle class that emerged proclaimed its loyalty to the King and found little to support any kind of political revolution that challenged the political-economic set up into which it was born. However, its economic security was not assured in the turn into the twentieth century when World War I impoverished the country. As the middle class found its safety net tethering on the edges of precarity, and coupled with modernist political ideals through a European education, they found themselves supporting a democratic revolution in 1932 when Siam's absolute monarchy was replaced with some semblance of democracy and where the King continued as the head of the state. Their sense of satisfaction in ushering in democracy did not last long as they found themselves disenchanted with not reaping the

benefits of the revolution. The rise of extreme left politics in this period made the middle class extremely uncomfortable as a result of which they found themselves switching sides again in 1938 to support the military takeover under Field Marshal Phibun Songkram. From 1938-1992, Thailand was mostly ruled by the military, although there were a few elected governments during this period. With the strong political and economic support of the American government in the 1950s and the 1960s, the military regime managed a stable control over the control and it was not until 1973 when in the post-Vietnam War era, American support began to wane and Thailand found itself facing an economic crisis (linked to the global oil crisis). This led to student protests in 1973, followed by a brutal military coup in 1976. After a decade or so of relative quiet, following a hostile military take-over in 1991, pro-democracy movements erupted in 1992, coinciding with a wave of such protests across Southeast Asia. This was prominently referred to as a middle class movement, and even known in popular media as the protest of the mobile phone mob. With the intervention of King, order was once again restored till the financial crisis of 1997 forced the middle classes to reconsider their political alliances. This economic meltdown ushered in a new kind of politics into the country, led by Thaksin Shinawatra, one that was populist and relied on a rural vote bank support outside of Bangkok. While the middle classes initially lend their support to his rise, under assurances of economic stability, their unease at sharing the 'spoils' with the rural peasantry and the political style of Thaksin meant that their support was not long-enduring. In 2006, the middle class cheered the deposing of Thaksin's democratically elected government in yet another military coup, one that has thrown the country once again into an era of political instability. This decision of the middle classes has also caused internal ruptures within as the upper and lower middle classes found themselves on the opposite side of the fence wearing either Yellow and Red shirts respectively. There seems to be no end to the crisis as in 2014, General Prayut Chan-O-Cha took power from the elected Prime Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra and then the army has absolute control.

Thus, for most part of the 20th century, from the 1932 democratic revolution through to the 1992 pro-democracy movements, Thailand has been

governed by an uneasy semi-democratic system, one that is often referred to as Thai-style democracy (Hewison 2008; Winichakul 2008; Connor 2008a), continuing through into the twenty-first century with the coup of 2006 and further political unrest in 2010. Given the country's history of quasi-colonisation, the monarchy retained the highest order in the hierarchy of the Thai political system, creating a specific socio-cultural approach within a unique political structure, sustained by a network of ruling elites and their alliances with the bureaucracy, military and the Thai middle class (specifically the Bangkok middle class). At a simple level, Thai-style democracy can be defined as the integration of authoritarianism and conservatism under a democratic rubric with the King as the head of state (Hewison 2008). In a context where the power of the monarchy is constantly asserted over that of the parliament, a semi-democratic system has come to exist under the domination of a mix of conservative military, monarchy and bureaucracy (Ferrara 2010). What this has meant is that while the population can exercise their rights, freedom and autonomy through official elections, real political power continues to remain in the hands of a minority elite.

While this is not unlike the reality of democratic politics in most countries, a specific form of Thai-style democracy evolved during the regime of Field Marshal Sarit who was convinced about the unsuitability of a western-style democracy in the context of Thai society; his prominent argument was that only a relatively small group of educated people would understand and practice democracy. Moreover, there were concerns that the patronage system embedded in Thai cultural and social systems would produce an ineffective democracy swayed by the undesirable practice of vote buying. This, it was argued, would bring about corruption amongst governors, obstructing the development of the country. Consequently, popular arguments have often been made for dictatorship or semi-democracy in Thailand as an appropriate system of governance until a fully democratic system can be implemented (Ferrara 2010; Connors 2011). The middle class proved to be crucial in sustaining Thai-style democracy, as they became key allies to the founders and administrators of this bureaucratic regime. Oddly, while a strong middle class is seen as the

foundation of a secure democracy (at least from an Aristotelian viewpoint), in the case of Thailand, given the rise of the old middle class through the Thai bureaucracy and their connections with the monarchy as well as the associated elites meant that they were important to the sustenance of Thai-style democracy and the suppression of full democracy. Their support flourished amidst a growing polarisation against the rural peasantry who favoured a more direct form of democratic governance, which was frowned upon severely. To put it simply, this has become the framing of the political conflicts in Thailand in the 21st century.

At one level, middle class support for Thai-style democracy is because of the possibility of sharing power, while at another level, it allows them to control the development agenda securing their own economic gains in the process. This is of course justified more objectively through arguments about corrupt Thai politicians and the need to reduce their political power, their extreme distrust of the vote bank of politics of the rural poor and the resulting dominance of province-based elections, and finally their subscription to a conservation of religious and cultural beliefs endorsing the supremacy of the King with a divine right to reign (Winichakul 2008; Eawsriwong 2009a). At the same time, one cannot ignore the extent to which the Thai middle class have ironically contributed to the instability of Thai-style democracy, almost to the extent of indulging in protest tantrums and destabilising the government every time their interests are threatened (Ferrara 2010). It is in this context that it is too simplistic to assume the pro-democracy tendencies of the middle class following their highly acclaimed participation in the Ruthless May 1992 protest. Following the 1997 financial crisis and economic crash, when the populist government of Thaksin Shinawatra was elected to power in 2001, there was little support from the Bangkok-based Thai middle class who were wary of his influence stemming from the support of a largely province-based peasantry. It thus does not come as a surprise that when in 2006, the military overthrew the government of a democratically elected Thaksin Shinawatra, the middle class supported the coup, reinforcing their commitment to Thai-style democracy. This is driven not just by interests of self-preservation but also a deep-seated mistrust of up-

country regions who, according to the middle class, are incapable of upholding the democratic tenets of good governance, promoting cronyism and mafia-like politics (Glassman 2010). As a result, it begs the question as to whether there can be any meaningful ideology framing Thai middle class politics and if one can discern specific characteristics within the nature of their political action.

3.3 A Thai middle class politics?

Even though the Thai middle class over the past century has demonstrated an appetite in equal measures to both democratic and authoritarian regimes, it still is difficult to discern any clear pattern about their politics. While in general, political scientists such as Huntington (1991), have followed Lipset in arguing that despite the necessity of military dictatorship in the early phases of modernisation, the growth of the middle class would help establish stable parliamentary systems, one cannot make simple assumptions about the central role of the middle class towards democratisation, as it is the complex dynamics of the economic interests of state, capital and civil society (i.e. middle class concerns) that proves a challenge towards democratic development. Moreover, socio-economic attributes such as income, education, age, and sex indicate a heterogeneity of middle class decisions regarding their support for democracy or not. More broadly, while middle class decisions regarding their support for democracy or not has been tied to their concerns of safeguarding their own economic benefits, socio-economic attributes such as income, education, age, sex, etc. reveal a heterogeneity in middle class positions and their eventual reactions to state-sponsored development programmes. This remains the crux of Thai middle class politics, having a bearing on which side they take in significant political events (the coups of 1932, 1973, 1976, 1992 and 2006). As Petchprasert (2000) observed, the direction of Thai middle class politics depends on situations, the overall environment, benefits and possible expectations from society and the economic conditions of the time. It is in this context that one feels compelled to clarify that the rise of a supposedly politically strong Thai middle class in the aftermath of the 1990s pro-democracy movement and the economic crisis indicates, not the emergence of a Thai democracy, but the sustained presence of a Thai-*style* democracy. This is

compounded by their continued interest in preserving their access to bureaucratic privileges, which would be compromised by a complete democratic transition. Even though the middle class might be an important catalyst in ushering in a democratically elected government, they are thus not able to sustain or consolidate it. At best, they facilitate conditions under which a restricted form of bourgeois democracy can flourish, while forging alliances with bedfellows such as the military.

3.3.1 Odd partners: Thai middle class and military regimes

The centrality of the middle class in Thai-style democracy is thus significant not only because of the role it played in its initial formation, but also due to the fact that it is not only a key socio-political indicator of democratic stabilisation, ironically also its destabilisation. The rise of a specific form of Thai middle class politics can generally be traced back to the 1932 democratic revolution as until then the ruling system of an absolute monarchy provided no space for the political development of a Thai middle class. As already established at the beginning of this chapter, it was the educational opportunities offered during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) (especially to study abroad) that nurtured the growth of the Thai middle class and who returned to join what can be considered a new extra-bureaucracy (Girling 1981). Their economic vulnerability however defined their political instability as seen in the first economic crisis of the early 1930s and their subsequent support of the 1932 revolution that successfully changed Thailand's administration from absolute to constitutional monarchy. This, however, did not signify a successful transition to full democracy but the establishment of Thai-style democracy, one that continues to this day (a mix of authoritarian and democratic regime). In the initial several decades after the revolution, the focus of the middle class was in capturing the bureaucracy, thereby influencing key government policies rather than the concretisation of some kind of ideological politics. It is therefore not surprising that the middle class hardly minded the increasing influence of military domination in politics and government, as a result of which, by the 1950s, the military had firmly entrenched itself in the establishment of an authoritarian regime. This did not mean that one could take for granted middle

class support for military dictatorship, as seen in their volte-face during the 1973 student revolts against military rule. This again failed to ensure a clear democratic transition, due to the ambivalent politics of the middle class as a result of which the best that could be achieved from the 1973 revolution was a shift in administrative power from a royalist aristocracy to the military. While it is tempting to follow the lead of other scholars such as Embong (2001) in concluding that the politics of the middle class is shaped by their need to secure their lifestyle and status, this is not sufficient to explain the uneasy alliance forged between the middle class and the military in the context of Thai-style democracy. For one, both share the principles of economic reform related to the sustenance of a specific kind of industrial capitalism. In addition, under the premiership of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-63) and the second premiership of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (1963-73), the government carefully created middle class occupations through the growth of several public-private enterprises, soliciting the flow of Foreign Direct Investment into Thailand, and reforming the Thai educational system (Yodkamonsat 2005; Laothamathas 1993b; Ockey 2001). Even though democratisation was suspended, the rise of capitalism during the authoritarian period managed to draw support from the middle class.

Thus, for many years, middle class aspirations continued to be sustained by an authoritarian government, ensuring their silent, if not vocal support for the military regime. However, with the first sign of economic decline in the 1970s threatening the future of their children (and the next generation) the middle class lent active support to an increasing mass of student protestors against the military. This cannot be mistaken for ideological support in favour of democracy, but a context-specific protest against the military regime's nepotism and corruption. While those such as Nimpanich (2005) and Phantasen (1994) view these moments, such as the 14 October 1973 riot, as the rise of a visible Thai middle class politics, to identify the middle class as a political giant seems premature, particularly given their continued political oscillation between democracy and dictatorship. Equally rushed is the effusion of writings on the role of the Thai middle class in the establishment of democracy in the aftermath

of the 1992 pro-democracy movement (Glassman 2010). In fact, thirteen years after the 'mobs with the mobile phones' led the 1992 pro-democracy movement, the Thai middle class once again took to the streets in 2006, seeking to overthrow the democratically elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra. While Glassman (2010) argues that the coup of 2006 represents a slide towards 'post-democracy', a situation in which there is still a functioning multiparty parliament, but in which governments elected by the majority cannot effectively function or carry out policies because of opposition, and a slide that is driven in part by an embattled middle class, the truth of the matter is the middle class mercilessly contributed towards the overthrow of a democratically elected government, simply because they feared not being able to gain from conventional parliamentary politics. Equally was the distrust of the alliance pulled together by business magnate turned politician, Thaksin Shinawatra, whose party Thai Rak Thai (Thai Love Thai or TRT) opposed the trend of neoliberal restructuring that dominated state policies in the 1990s, favouring instead modest Keynesian and neo-mercantilist policies to reinvigorate the Thai economy and generate competitiveness (Glassman 2010). While not antagonistic to trade liberalisation, the success of Thaksin hinged on his ability to unleash, amidst a fragile economic condition, a series of extensive 'populist' spending programmes, capturing the support of the poor and the peasantry. While the middle class have a tendency to treat such extravagant schemes with distaste, their support for the military overthrow of a democratically elected Thaksin government is more due to their subscription to a specific form of nationalism, one that Glassman (2010: 1314) refers to as a royalist-nationalist hegemony:

> The close relationship between the military and the Crown means that the crucial interests here have always been royal and it is indeed only because most of the struggles over democratisation in the 1990s did not deeply challenge royal power, wealth or prerogative, that the military could be successfully pushed to the sidelines (Handley, 2006; Connors, 2007, 2008). When Thaksin's regime began to challenge some royal interests after the turn of the century, the military emerged as a significant player.

The middle class accused Thaksin's regime as being corrupt and authoritarian to justify their support of the 2006 coup amidst a conviction that this destabilisation of democracy was necessary to solve Thailand's larger political problems. However, as Nelson (2007) argues, in retaining the status quo of a post-coup Thai-style democracy, the Thai middle class in the twenty-first century has been reluctant to allow governments elected by the majority to effectively function, utilising their disproportionate political power and media exposure to overturn political decisions, especially those in favour of the poor or the rural peasantry. In fact, appropriately the very 'unruly' behaviour that the middle class have often been critical of, a broad alliance of 'Yellow Shirts' emerged in the build up to the 2006 coup, comprising of pro-monarchy networks drawn from the middle class, aristocrats, politicians, government officers and old elites and occupying the streets of Bangkok. Dominating the political space from 2005 to 2008, the Yellow Shirts campaign successfully rallied for the overthrow of Thaksin Shinawatra to install their representative Abhisit Vejjajiva. This transition was hardly peaceful as street protests were soon taken over a new group of 'Red Shirts' claiming to support Thaksin Shinawatra, and calling into question the legitimacy of the Yellow Shirts campaign in overthrowing a democratically elected government. Even though the Red Shirts have been portrayed as a mob of urban poor, rural peasants and the lower working classes, the heterogeneity of middle class support needs to be acknowledged in the polarisation of these two camps where the lower middle class have rallied alongside the Red Shirts against an upper middle class tendency to support the Yellow Shirts. What is also interesting here is the way the Red Shirts presented themselves as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), condemning the Yellow Shirts as supporters of an old bureaucratic system of Thai-style democracy.

This recent political steer of the middle class in favour of an authoritarian regime cannot be merely seen as a sign of yet another swing from democracy to dictatorship. While it cannot be denied that in the 21st century, the middle class have tended to associate democratic governments with corrupt and inept regimes, the reality is that such characterisations can easily extend to

dictatorial case as well (as history has clearly established). What is notable here is the politics of a specific form of middle class; a Bangkok-based urban middle class. Thus, even though Glassman (2010) cautions against the inadequate geographical imaginations of Bangkok/up-country or urban/rural binaries, he acknowledges the influence of a middle class, stronger in Bangkok than elsewhere in the country, and whose sentiments are not unequivocally anti-neoliberal but one that supports state interventionist policies to safeguard their own interests. Historically, the rise of a Bangkok-based middle class is a legacy bequeathed by the Bangkok-centric Cold War state and Thailand's longer history of Bangkok-centric royalism, resulting in a very specific understanding of Thai social problems: "capitalism, class relations and other forms of social hierarchy have little if any responsibility for these problems, whereas corruption and socio-political underdevelopment (intellectual, moral and political) of Thai rural society is responsible for much of the malaise" (*ibid*.: 1305-1306). As Glassman (2010) further demonstrates, the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR), comprising the metropolis and the five adjacent provinces of Samut Prakan, Nonthaburi, Patum Thani, Nakon Pathom and Samut Sakhon contain the largest share of working-class groups of any region, both working classes and dominant classes have been in relative decline, compared with the middle classes that have grown from 23.7 per cent to 37.9 per cent of the labour force. Also, it is this rise of the middle classes that has skewed Bangkok's support towards state objectives of capitalist growth, one that was threatened and thwarted by the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra's populist government. This, as an explanation, is not sufficient and perhaps the political volatility of the Thai middle class, especially in the 21st century is better explained by understanding their insecurities that arose in the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis. In fact, places the 2006 coup amidst a more comprehensive understanding of the 1997 financial crisis, a momentous occasion triggering a shift in the domestic agenda from political reform to economic recovery.

3.4 Middle class politics in the face of economic boom and bust

A common argument that analysts of Thai (middle class) politics often resort to in making sense of their unpredictable political choices, is that it is driven

mainly by their need to safeguard their economic self-interests. If there is any semblance of a politics within the Thai middle class, then it is one that is shaped by economic concerns. Right from their participation in the 1932 revolution, middle class political decisions have been based on specific economic issues, such as the imposition of the salary tax in 1932, the global economic crisis of the 1970s (related to the global rise in oil prices as well as the more regional impact of the end of the Vietnam War), as well as safeguarding a profitable status quo as seen in the temperate economic climate of the early 1990s, one that was unnecessarily threatened by the 1991 military coup, leading to the now acclaimed pro-democracy protest, also known as Ruthless May of 1992. Amidst a generally well-performing economy, in 1991, a military coup led by Generals Sunthorn Kongsompong Suchinda Kraprayoon, Issarapong Noonpakdi and Kaset Rojananil ousted the elected Prime Minister, General Chatichai Choonhavan on charges of corruption amidst a promise of holding elections soon after to restore democracy (Khien 1997). This coup was unexpected, since throughout the 1980s, the country witnessed a gradual process of democratisation under military auspices and there seemed to be a general mood of satisfaction with the political situation. The middle class that had benefited from the economic boom became attached to a liberalised trade policy could only express concern when General Sunthorn, the instigator of the coup, became the de facto leader of Thailand. Within a year, amidst a fragile political condition and with no signs of stabilisation, the middle class found itself joining a growing line of protestors, becoming violent on Bangkok's streets demanding a restoration of democracy. A survey of demonstrators carried out by the Social Science Association of Thailand showed that 52 per cent of the demonstrators claimed a comfortable monthly income of over 10,000 Baht (approximately £200 GBP). In addition, media portrayals of protestors wearing suits, carrying mobile phones and getting down from their luxury cars circulated widely to create an illusion of the 1992 democratisation process as largely spearheaded by the Bangkok middle class (Ockey 2004; Laothamathas 1993a; Shiraishi and Phongpaichit 2008; Yoshifumi 20008). To these observers this was a crucial turning point as it signalled the emergence of the new middle class as a key political actor. However, as Glassman (2010) has argued, in the wake of the

2006 coup, all social actors in Thailand, be they the rural peasants or urban middle class have similar, basic motivations and political projects, typically centred around improving their social and material welfare. For the middle class, the coup happened at an inappropriate moment when Thailand was experiencing a golden period of economic growth, one that could be easily disrupted by a coup. This was seen in a dramatic reduction in Foreign Direct Investment into the country, one that had a telling effect on the nation's economy. It is this fear of economic retribution that incited the middle class into joining the 1992 protest (Eawsriwong 1993; Charoenlert 1993). The junta eventually relinquished power and an interim civilian government was appointed, followed by a 15 year elected government.

Thai scholar Laothamathas (1996, 2010), in refusing to discount the significance of Thai middle class in these political transformations, offers a thesis of 'Two tales of a democracy model' whereby, while a rural peasant majority might be crucial in electing a government to power, it is the minority urban middle class who ensure its stability. He was convinced that following the ousting of the military regime, the middle class would assume a central position in developing an ideal model of democracy and help sustain it. This, however, did not occur, mainly because of the different attitudes of the rural poor and the urban middle class towards elections and democracy, wherein rural votes are often considered to be easily manipulated by politicians through the promise of local development projects, while the middle class is apparently more discerning of the ideals, morals and abilities of politicians, rejecting the offered patronage system. Their interest is supposedly in the larger interests of the national economy, whose prosperity, in reality, marks their own security. This is seen in the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis, when in July that year, the Thai government had to devalue the Baht, resulting in an economic melt-down that had an immediate impact on the middle class (mainly through the collapse of the banking and real estate sector). As jobs were lost, amidst the turmoil, one of the first reactions of the middle class was to query the sensibility of their support for a democratic set up since 1992, one that had essentially led the country into this crisis. As the government adopted an IMF imposed neoliberal

policy in the aftermath of the financial crisis, stringent economic restructuring contributed to further economic decline between 1997 and 2001. As popular opposition to neoliberalism gained ground, a heterogeneous array of political forces came together with business groups to form an alliance headed by Thaksin Shinawatra, which was elected to power in 2001 with a substantial mandate. Bangkok middle-class groups initially endorsed this new government and were generally supportive of Thaksin Shinawatra's economic policies (a combination of modest Keynesian and neo-mercantilist politics to protect the Thai state's export-led capitalist growth project). However, as images of Thaksin Shinawatra as corrupt and authoritarian began to circulate and take precedence, middle class support waned with concerns over his economic policies leaning towards cronyism and favouring the rural poor. In no time, they had joined the line of pro-coup supporters.

3.4.1 Middle classes, the 1997 financial crisis and its aftermath

Much of the Thai middle classes' political actions in twenty-first century has been influenced to a large extent by how they weathered the 1997 financial crisis. While scholars have generally acknowledged that the economic crash affected all social groups differently (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000), it is only recently that its specific effects on the middle classes are being unravelled clearly (Sathiniramai 2010; Satayanuruk 2014). While the most obvious impact was in terms of employment, affecting mostly the city's migrants drawn from the poor and lower spectrum of the middle classes with unexpected layoffs. While many chose to return to their rural bases, leading to acute political foment in Thailand's rural peasantry, this was slightly different to the lower middle class who chose to remain in Bangkok. Initially, in the face of economic adversity, they realised their odd position of being politically conscious but with little power in influencing politics. This was despite their central role in the production process and sustaining the market through their labour. Used to being ignored by the government in the years prior to the 1997 crisis and relying little on their political capital (Eawsriwong 2010; Sathiniramai 2010; Pintobtang 2010; Satayanuruk 2014), the lower middle class found themselves captivated by the populist politics of Thaksin Shinawatra, who rose to power in

the aftermath of the crisis. Not only was his promise to return Thailand to economic glory reassuring for them in terms of employment prospects, but they also were attracted by their own political agency as their support was solicited through specific schemes such as government sponsored non-Bank loan schemes (Satayanuruk 2014). They also realised that elections were not the only means of wielding this political power, and they began to actively create spaces for themselves in this new political landscape.

On the other hand, the upper middle class seemed to have survived the crisis relatively unscathed (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000). Part of the reason why they did not face economic insecurities in terms of job loss is because of the way they had captured reliable positions towards the top of the ladder during Thailand's boom years from the 1950s and have had decades of stabilising themselves, positions that cannot be easily destabilised. Yet they were uneasy about the crisis and its aftermath as they were desirous of the country being put back into its trajectory of economic growth. It was this sense of self-preservation that saw them reluctantly supporting Thaksin Shinawatra in his first electoral campaign as he was voted to power in 2001. Their misgivings about his populist policies prioritising the rural poor and the lower middle classes however held sway as they withdrew their support in the 2005 elections. When Thaksin was nevertheless re-elected, the upper middle classes felt as if they had no choice but to side with the coterie of royalist-nationalist politicians who overthrew his government with the support of the army in 2006.

Thus, the 1997 financial crisis acted as a trigger in instigating long simmering tensions with the middle classes, a heterogeneity that fell apart in the face of economic hardship and the different political possibilities that emerged in its aftermath. For the lower middle class, Thai-style democracy deprived them of a crucial political voice (Satayanuruk 2014; Eawsriwong 2010), one that they found by donning Red Shirts and joining the waver of Thaksin protesters on the streets of Bangkok. Given the larger political history of the Thai middle classes, it comes as no surprise that the upper middle class

hedged their bets on the side of the Yellow Shirts. This fracture is telling and needs to be acknowledged as otherwise we tend to slip into oversimplifications that pitch a broad base of middle classes supporting the Yellow Shirts against the rural poor flooding into the streets of Bangkok in favour of restoring Thaksin, or at least his party to power (Sathiniramai 2010). Eawsriwong (2010) contributes to understanding this distinction better when he argues that by joining the Red shirts the lower middle class are essentially emphasising their right to participate in a democractic political system while the upper middle class toe the line of the Yellow shirts who insist on good governance and prosperity over democracy. This fragmentation of the middle classes has been an unintended consequence of Thailand's recent political turmoil combined with its economic crisis and its aftermath. Acknowledging is key to not only further studies of the Thai middle classes but also how it renders complex the pursuit of a straightforward urban development agenda for Bangkok.

3.5 Conclusion

To simply suggest that the Thai middle class has emerged as an important player in contemporary politics is not enough. Similarly, as this chapter has shown, to reduce the politics of the Thai middle classes to one that swings between democracy and dictatorship, driven by self-preservation and self-interest, is also too simplistic. It is in this context that the chapter resists common tendencies to portray the Thai middle class as paradoxical, akin to most depictions in the literature. Beginning with a genealogical analysis of the Thai middle class highlights the difficulty in discerning any clear traits to their political behaviour right from the way they initially supported the democratic transition in 1932 to their tolerance and even support of seventeen military coups until their radical about-turn against authoritarianism in 1992. While this shift has been much written about and touted in the literature as a clear evidence of middle class support for pro-democracy movements in the late-1990s, the murky transitional politics of a post-democracy (Glassman 2010) that emerged in the 21st century cautions against any rushed judgements about Thai middle class politics. At one level, what is clear is their crucial role in sustaining what has come to be known as Thai-style democracy, a combination

of quasi-democracy within an authoritarian regime, a clear example being their support of the 2006 coup against a democratically elected government. A large part of their scepticism towards the possibility of complete democracy in Thailand stems from their lack of faith in Thai politicians and their abuse of the democratic system by creating client-patron relationships with an easily manipulated rural vote bank. At another level, Koo's (1991) analysis of the Korean middle class whereby different segments of the middle class responded to political change in different ways, with transitions between democracy and dictatorship suggesting a series of conjunctures, each of which is rooted within their own conflicts and issues.

What is equally important is the role of Bangkok's economic and political primacy in shaping the character and significance of middle class politics. Thus, in an insightful analysis of urbanity, class and post-democracy in Thailand, Glassman (2010: 1301) provocatively suggests that, "The provinces elect governments, Bangkok overthrows them". Here, even though he acknowledges the need to break with the simple form of Bangkok/up-country and urban/rural binaries, such bias that is perpetuated by a longstanding Bangkok-centric commitment to capitalist growth and a middle-class interpretation of Thai social problems, where capitalism, class relations and other forms of social hierarchy are hardly an issue, the culprit being corruption and socio-political underdevelopment of Thai rural society. This clubbed together with continued middle-class support of a royalist-nationalist hegemony has specific connotations of how they engage with urban development agendas at the metropolitan level, which is the focus of the empirical chapters in this thesis. In order to undertake such an investigation, we need to go beyond the usual portrayals of the middle class as consumer-driven because the binary of the old and new middle class offers little insight into the complexity of their political actions and reactions. Understanding their heterogeneity along the lines of upper and lower middle classes, as suggested by Funatsu and Kagoya (2003), provides an alternative way to unravel, not only a broader sense of their socio-political consciousness, but also how a rationale of everyday practices is constructed.

Chapter 4 Methodology

For a research that strives to understand how the politics of Thai middle classes amidst unstable political circumstances shapes (or does not) their framings of Bangkok's urban development agenda, methodologies within urban studies were sought that would help profile a narrative of the same, especially one that could account for a constantly shifting scenario. This is done keeping in mind Lees' (2003) caution that new urban geography provides very little methodological description. To begin with, qualitative methods were chosen for this study, the details of which are explained in the following section. This is followed by fieldwork processes starting with entry into the field, data collection and how 'fieldwork' was actually done. It also clarifies the tools, participants, and problems that were encountered in the field, concluding with details of how primary data from fieldwork collection was analysed.

4.1 Making a decision on the methodology

The scope of methodological choices within urban geography at a broad level generally is nothing exceptional, involving a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, with much research opting for a mixed methods approach. Often pitched in a binary mode of differentiation, quantitative methods are considered to be concrete, objective, statistic-related, and a scientific way of collecting data, while qualitative methods are argued to be flexible, subjective, not statistic-related, and as a result, may be viewed as a non-scientific way of collecting data. The final method employed in most research is a combination of the two, with all three revealing their own positives and negatives in the course of collecting data. Quantitative methods are seen as reliable and valid since these methods allow researchers to study a wider population sample (Silverman 2011). Moreover, quantitative methods are numerical and can be conveniently evaluated even though they may not always take into account important social and cultural contexts of the data or the population. Fielding and Fielding (1986:21) thus argue that generalising a large population sample of survey results omits possible divergences in the way participants' respond to

questions in a formal context. Moreover, quantitative methods may involve very little or no contact with participants and the field (Silverman 2011:42). This is because these methods limit the responses of participants by tying the sets of methodologies tightly within variables and concepts of hypotheses or the operational definition of the research title. In contrast, qualitative methods have advantages that quantitative methods do not address. Qualitative methods are capable of recording phenomena that would not be available otherwise (*ibid*.), in the sense that they can extract in great detail the internal lives and nature from social and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, disadvantages of qualitative methods include possible invalidity and unreliability; bias, misunderstanding and misinterpretation that can be injected by both participants and researchers. Reliability of qualitative results often comes to be questioned. Moreover, the use of data in explaining a qualitative research conclusion provided from summary conversations and from unstructured interviews are not representative or generalisable (Singleton et al. 1988). Nonetheless, some qualitative researchers argue that the reliability of observations is only a concern within the quantitative method tradition; what the quantitative method users refer to as a positivist position with no difference between the natural and social context (Silverman 2011). Those who support qualitative methods insist that quantitative research overlooks the social and cultural format of the variables and neglect meanings in social life and do not explore any further understanding that can only be provided by a qualitative form of study (Silverman 2000).

A mixed method approach is therefore seen as a reconciliation, allowing researchers to combine qualitative and quantitative methods in their study. Mixed methods give an opportunity to researchers to mix and match elements from qualitative and quantitative methodologies that can help deliver the best opportunity to retrieve best quality data for their research. Mixed methods are able to overcome the imposed separation between qualitative and quantitative methods (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2004). This can draw strengths and minimise weaknesses of both methods in research (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson 2004). Therefore, if appropriate, it is good to combine both methods in research to

make the best of a study. For instance, a qualitative study might want to supplement its observations and interviews with a closed-ended instrument to record systematically certain factors considered important in the literature (*ibid*: 19). However, nothing is perfect. Mixed methods can be expensive and time consuming since the researcher essentially needs to apply two methodologies within one study. Human geographers however have tended to depend overwhelmingly on qualitative methods because they are able to gauge a richness of social and cultural contexts at independent sites and situations (Baxter and Eyles 1997). It is clear that qualitative methods are suitable for studies that aim to explore and explain a detailed understanding of social and cultural issues within certain contexts, situations, cultures and households. These techniques are robust for retrieving primary data from members of society, particularly local communities and social groups (Mullings 1999; Winchester 2000). Qualitative methods allow researchers to contribute an in-depth understanding of the inside workings of human discourse and social issues. They also allow a researcher's circumstances to make informed decisions in terms of gaining access to this study of human experience (Baxter and Eyles 1997).

Given that this dissertation is about the Thai middle classes, a difficult to categorise social group, the pursuit of quantitative methods did not seem suited to the elusive nature of the subject. Also, since the primary objective of the research is to study how their larger politics intersects with their everyday concerns and what it means for Bangkok's urban development agenda (one that is conveniently framed within the mandate of bourgeois urbanism), it became pertinent to employ qualitative methods, as this would facilitate the collection of middle class narratives essential to the discourse. Qualitative analysis is, after all, ideal for extracting one's own ideas and behaviours (Seale 2008) to understand the perspectives, roles and responses of the middle class. Additionally, dissecting middle class reactions to government policies around urban development can only be done through qualitative methods. In what can be considered an outdated argument, Jane M Jacobs (1993) made a still relevant case for Third World cities being more suited for qualitative research than that

of their western counterparts since it is such cities that have been subject to some of the most sustained and exclusive ethnographic studies. While much of Thailand's political and economic transformations in the past few decades have been studied at a macro level using quantitative methods, there is nevertheless a good set of scholarship that looks at its social transitions in a detailed manner using qualitative methods. It is in the spirit of the latter that this thesis uses qualitative methods to draw information from respondents, using direct verbatim quotations in the analysis to ensure data rigour (Baxter and Eyles 1997). While semi-structured, in-depth interviews and on-site observations were employed to generate an enormous amount of primary data, supplementary data was collected from both numerical and textual documents such as planning policies, transportation development plans and policies, local journals, books, newspapers, population statistics, economic-related data and social network forums.

Conducting an in-depth interview was a key method for this research to get a deep understanding of middle class politics and how it influences their approach to the city's urban development challenges. Understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they extract from those experiences are at the root of the in-depth interview method (Seidman 1998:3). In the beginning, questionnaires were used to ask a limited set of questions as a way of engaging with participants. This use of a standardised format to which they may disagree or partly disagree (Valentine 1997), was used as an ice-breaker, especially when a few middle-class residents were solicited first as gate-keepers. This was followed by in–depth interviews which have an advantage of offering detailed information that cannot be flushed out by other methods (Eyles 1988). In-depth interviews provide a relaxed atmosphere as people may feel like they are 'really' talking about a crucial topic (in this case, it might be about flooding problems in their neighbourhood or Bangkok mass transit issues), as opposed to filling out a survey quietly to themselves (Boyce and Neale 2006). In-depth interviews also give a researcher the opportunity to clarify explanations related to a participant's experiences, such as the expression of complex ideas and contradictory opinions. This method allows

participants to express, in their own words, their own perceptions and understanding of topics. The interviewer is thus able to collect a story from the interviewee to better comprehend their course of action, as one way of knowing is listening to a story. Every word that people use gives a peek into their consciousness and this provides access to their complex experiences (Seidman 1998).

On-site observation was another key method used in conducting fieldwork. These on-site observations were used to retrieve environmental, social, political and cultural factors from the neighbourhoods itself where interviews were undertaken to understand the everyday concerns of residents and what the larger politics means to them in these quotidian circumstances. On-site observation gave me a deeper comprehension of the interviewees' experiences and to the similarities or differences between the two neighbourhoods studied. More importantly, it allows us to understand the "language of the city" (Jacobs 1993:831), and is important not to simply know that the urban environment is meaningful, but to know who is communicating through the environment, to what audience, and to what purposes (Knox 1982 paraphrased by Jacobs 1993: 831). This included taking photographs, constantly travelling around case study areas (see Figure 4-1) and noting experiences or factors from the observations to evaluate the socio-cultural environment that comes alive outside of the map.

Figure 4-1: This picture shows one on-site observation (Bangyai District) when one of the participants was willing to show his neighbourhood along the canals.

Source: Researcher, 08 August 2012

4.2 Applying methodology to fieldwork

After studying literature related to the middle classes, Bangkok, urban development, and selecting appropriate research methodologies, applying them in the field was the next step. Given, the circumstances of Thai-style democracy and its political volatility in the twenty-first century, initial chapters reviewing Bangkok and the Thai middle class pointed out to a distinct polarization within the middle classes, broadly along the lines of lower and upper middle classes. Fieldwork was designed keeping this in mind and the current bipartisan political circumstances. In order to ensure quality data, that one thing that

became obvious was the need to enter and exit the field several times. Thus, fieldwork was conducted from June to August in 2011, 2012 and 2013. In addition, this section discusses all fieldwork-related issues, including the in-depth interview questions, participants, case study area selection and problems encountered on field.

4.2.1 Entering the field

The period prior to entering the field proved to be one of the most difficult parts in this study. In addition to preparing the interview questions and considering doing a 'sampling' first, there was also the issue of choosing the 'right time' to be in the field to ensure high quality data collection. This was naïve, given the unpredictability of political turmoil that unfolded in Bangkok between 2011 and 2013. In a sense, this provided rich opportunities for the study as the run up to the 3 July 2011 national election made it possible to gather responses from the Bangkok middle classes before, during and after the election. An election is one of the key elements of a democratic system that many studies use to investigate peoples' attitudes towards democracy. The very first fieldwork was conducted between June and August 2011, which began about a month before the election and concluded a week before Election Day, the latter decision made based on advice from local scholars that participants might be less willing to talk to a stranger about political issues so close to the election. So, fieldwork was suspended in late June and resumed a week after the election.

Conducting the first fieldwork just before and just after the Thai national election in 2011 provided a good opportunity to generally explore middle class attitudes towards politics, their activities, and their responses to political issues during the election campaign and this period of political change. The first fieldwork sought to examine middle-class perspectives on Thai politics, and how these perspectives would affect their reactions to urban planning processes in BMR. As a result, these 2011 interviews mainly focused on the the politics of the middle classes, their engagement with the dominant Thai-styel democracy and their responses to specific urban development issues that became central within the electoral campaign such as the mass transit rail in Bangkok.

But before interviewing ordinary middle class residents, scholars, journalists, planners, and local politicians were interviewed. This was prioritized as a group that is not only well informed, but also as a way of setting up a medium to compare notes with the middle class responses – how did this fare against established 'expert' opinion or 'those in the know' about the same issues. These interviews also provided some suggestions on how to get Bangkok middle class residents to open up and speak frankly. In the first instance, scholars at Chulalongkorn University were interviewed. Four key academics from three different departments were approached, and this included Associate Professor Narote Palakawongsa Na Ayudhaya, Geography Department, Professor Charas Suwanmala and Professor Chaiyand Chaiyaporn, both from the Faculty of Political Science, and Associate Professor Narong Phetprasert, Faculty of Economics. Since this research is directly related to the BMR, it was useful to get an open-ended perspective from Associate Professor Narote Palakawongsa Na Ayudhaya. As this research is also related to politics, interviews with Professors Charas Suwanmala and Chaiyan Chaiyaporn were also very helpful. Lastly, Associate Professor Narong Phetprasert is well known for his academic studies on the Thai middle classes and his opinions simply could not be omitted. Each of the academics interviewed provided useful and candid information. Additionally, each suggested approaches I could employ in engaging middle class residents, and they also provided links to planners and policy makers, which proved to be an important gateway for sourcing important planning documents and debates.

The role of planners in any urban development process cannot be ignored and they were a major source of information for this study. In the first fieldwork section, one Bangkok planner and two planners from the local districts were interviewed. The interviews were conducted to see how these planners work, how they perceive planning and how they perceive planning as one intended primarily for the middle classes. Their responses were used to design interview questions for the middle class residents, as well as compare the ideas of planners and the middle classes about planning processes and related issues. Moreover, meeting the planners also allowed detailed knowledge

of urban planning history in the BMR. After collecting data from academics and planners, journalists were sought for their opinions. However, asking for an in-depth interview with a journalist is not an easy task because of the busy nature of their occupation. They seem to be more eager to meet those who provide information, than a researcher who requires information from them as a source; also, talking to an unknown PhD candidate would not help them advance their own careers. Initial efforts at contacting a few journalists were met without success. It was only after family members provided personal introductions to journalist acquaintances of theirs that a few of them eventually agreed to be interviewed. Suggestions from scholars and journalists towards the design of the interview questions were taken on board. The first set of interviewees were upper middle class residents in the neighbourhood of Bangna. This decision was made given better familiarity than the other neighbourhood of Bangyai. In the first stage, residents were sought through simply walking around a few times and asking for interviews. Many, of course, refused. But as a few eventually warmed up to the idea of an interview, it provided the crucial opening one needs to access other participants in such research. These first few provided invaluable introductions to friends and relatives in Bangna, as they simply wouldn't have agreed if someone had knocked on their door. Thus, snowball sampling proved to be the most effective way of selecting samples for empirical material collection.

Snowball sampling is a non-probability technique where a participant refers the researcher to other participants with the group expanding like a rolling snowball. This sampling technique has a high potential for subjectively biased results. However, the bias can be reduced or eliminated if numerous people with different individual characteristics are included. This method is an effective tool for building and expanding connections with the locals and is often used with groups reluctant to be interviewed, for various reasons. This method is also well-suited for accessing Thai middle classes, who are often reluctant to discuss anything with strangers, especially a sensitive topic such as Thai politics. Moreover, this research used in-depth interviews rather than simple questionnaire surveys to obtain descriptive answers rather than statistics. With

random sampling the intention is to study a representative subsection of a precisely defined population in order to make inferences about the whole population, whereas the objective here was to study a particular group of individuals and their actions/reactions in a specific setting. Thus, purposive sampling where participants were enlisted through a snowballing process of recommendations was used (Arabindoo 2008). After interviewing Bangna residents for a while, it felt like it was time to shift to the other research site – Bangyai. Here, the interviewees were approached in a different manner, where randomly knocking on doors would not have helped at all. It was pertinent to be introduced to the neighourhood through a 'known face', and a friend's relative who lives in Bangyai proved to be the gatekeeper required to enter the site. This helped to expand the pool of interviewees quite quickly.

At the end of the first fieldwork period, the Pheu Thai Party won the 2011 national election, soundly defeating the Democrat Party. Yingluck Shinawatra, sister of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, became prime minister on August 5 2011, only two months before the floods reached the outer parts of BMR. The Pheu Thai Party was largely seen as the reincarnation of Thaksin's defunct Thai Rak Thai Party and Yingluck was generally viewed as Thaksin's puppet, while he pulled the strings from his self-imposed exile abroad. In fact, in the run up to the 2011 election, Pheu Thai campaigned with the slogan *Thaksin thinks, Pheu Thai acts*. Thus, the 2011 election marked yet another important change, ten years after Thaksin's landslide victory triggered a shift in Thai politics. Political power shifted from the Democrats and their coalition partners to Pheu Thai and its new coalition partners. Pheu Thai formed a coalition with much smaller parties: Chartthaipattana, Chart Pattana Puea Pandin, Phalang Chon, Mahachon, and New Democracy, giving Yingluck a total of 300 out of 500 votes in the House of Representatives, a sound majority. This was the focus of the second phase of interviews in 2011 to see how the two middle class resident groups perceived the results.

The second stage of fieldwork was conducted in 2012, one year after this major shift in political power at national level. Although Bangkok remained a

stronghold for the Democrat Party, which retained considerable political power at the local level, the one-year period following national political change was considered to have stabilized enough to focus now on Thai middle class responses to Bangkok's urban development agenda, using projects proposed, those in the pipeline and ones that were completed (or at least sort of). These interviews were also used to review the political position of the middle class vis a vis the ruling party and how this played a role in the way they responded to the city's own urban development aspirations. Interviews were conducted between June and September 2012, with questions broadly probing the middle classes about their politics, their city and its infrastructure. Mass transit rail projects turned out to be a popular topic, as the BTS (SkyTrain) and MRT (underground) projects have been very successful in attracting Bangkok voters. When the BTS first opened in 1999, many Bangkok residents, having never experienced an inner-city rail system before, did not appreciate how this new infrastructure would improve their quality of life and many stuck to the tried and tested 5 baht public buses rather than pay up to 40 baht for a train ride. However, they soon came to appreciate the value of getting to and from work in much less time. Additionally, the BTS was safer and more reliable than public buses. The same can be said for the MRT, which opened in 2004. The majority of Bangkokians (mostly from the middle classes) eventually came to find the BTS and MRT systems indispensable to their daily lives, with calls to see the lines extended and the services improved. Although all major parties in the 2011 election were in favour of expanding mass transit rail in Bangkok, after the election, it became Pheu Thai's mainstay agenda, as the elected government in 2011, to facilitate mass transit expansion and improvement plans. More importantly, in the aftermath of the devastating 2011 floods, this second round of fieldwork interviews also investigated middle class responses to the floods and what role urban planning could play in preventing such a calamity. This proved to be relevant for, as mentioned earlier, the severe flooding crisis happened in the BMR less than three months after the elected government took power. It became a huge issue in Thailand, particularly for Bangkok citizens.

The second fieldwork interviews began with revisiting the local planning department. A second interview was conducted with a planner who had already been interviewed in 2011 alongside another planner from the same department. During these 2012 interviews, the planners emphasized that there would be local community planning meetings concerning upcoming projects. Hypothesising that these meetings would draw an entirely different view than from the people interviewed in the first fieldwork, plans were made to attend the community meetings as an observer and gain first-hand knowledge of the urban planning process and see how 'locals' participated when given the chance. Attending these meetings was an important step in the research process as residents felt comfortable about talking with someone they got used to seeing around. This time around, they also provided contacts to older residents, many of whom had been in the neighbourhood for decades, with a wealth of local information and a diverse set of personal opinions. Thus, with more personal introductions, the snowball sampling method again gained momentum. Although the second round of fieldwork interviews concentrated more on the middle class residents, additional set of scholars and journalists were again interviewed. Also in 2012, local community leaders were interviewed to gain a better understanding of how a sense of community developed over the years, how the local government works to help sustain the middle class nature of these neighbourhoods, and what the middle class and other residents need in the way of infrastructure development. The head of the Office of Transport Traffic Policies and Planning, who is directly involved with transportation policies and the Department of City Planning of the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) was interviewed in this regard. These interviews with scholars, journalists and planners were not only to obtain their views on how they see the middle classes, their politics and the urban plan, but also to seek details on the process of how policy makers feel about the middle classes and how they fit into their policies and how critical were their desires in making key decisions on the same. Interviews with policy makers provided a clearer understanding of the planning process in Bangkok as a possibly middle class process and gave fruitful information to compare the real policy process with the perception of the process as seen by middle class residents. After the second fieldwork section,

there were no significant changes in Thai politics. Yingluck Shinawatra still remained Thailand's Prime Minister. Flooding protection schemes were in the process of approval and construction of the rail mass transit system extensions continued in some areas of the BMR as a part of a larger system. However, a new round of political conflict was beginning to take roots once again in the city.

The third and final fieldwork interviews were conducted between July and September 2013, two years after the national election and one year after the flooding crisis. These interviews aimed to develop further understanding of the middle class and their participation in politics and urban development policies. With the Pheu Thai government solidly in power for two years, members of the middle class would certainly have had time to develop clear opinions on how well the government had performed with regards to urban planning challenges in Bangkok, and specific projects such as the BTS. It also allowed to find out whether a new group of interviewees, from the two middle class neighbourhoods studied, would have similar opinions as those expressed in 2011 and 2012, or if two years into the Pheu Thai government had altered the general opinions of the neighbourhood residents. The third stage of fieldwork allowed to evaluate the maturation of middle class relationship with politics and urban development during the initial stages of a new kind of political instability at the national level and this was assumed to have at least some impact on the opinions of the 2013 interviewees.

In 2013, a Village Headman in Bangyai who had already been interviewed in 2012 was approached for introductions to residents who may be willing to be interviewed. These introductions led to a new pool of interviewees and started a new network for snowball sampling to avoid the pitfall of gaining a repetition of the same opinions expressed by interviewees in the 2011 and 2012 fieldwork. Also in 2013, alternative arguments from additional scholars and experts were solicitied, particularly with regard to mass transit rail providers and transportation policy makers. Again, meeting and interviewing these experts was not an easy task. Without personal connections, it was difficult to make appointments with them, since they are very busy, and

some of them are civil servants who may be reluctant to express personal opinions that might not be advantageous to their careers. Many would consider it a waste of time to accept an interview with a PhD student. Some higher-ranked policy makers and bureaucrats might think it beneath their position or dignity to be interviewed by a student. There is a certain implicit hierarchy in Thai society and organisations, both public and private, and it is sometimes difficult to cross these lines to gain access to those who consider themselves too important to be bothered with 'underlings'. Again, to gain such access, personal introductions were essential. Using such connections, an introduction was obtained to the Acting Director of the Policy and Strategy Bureau, a key transportation policy maker. This interview led to the Head of the Rail Transportation Group, Ministry of Transport. Both of these officials provided a wealth of quality information about the rail mass transit system in terms of development processes, problems, target groups, aims of the systems, its association with Bangkok residents and how policy makers perceive the middle classes. Additionally, interviews with representatives from the two rail mass transit providers, BTS and MRT was also made possible: the Executive Director of BTS Group Holding Co., Ltd. and the President of Bangkok Metropolitan Public Company Ltd. Each provided well-informed insights better understand mass transit rail system-related issues from their prospective as mass transit providers for BMR residents. Moreover, as access to these individuals was gained by way of personal introductions, these executives felt a certain level of comfort to disclose their own personal insights that may not be available in public documents or information disseminated to the general public. These interviews provided a basis by which to compare the opinions of policy makers and providers with the responses of middle class residents. In short, these expert interviews were conducted to develop a better understanding of how scholars and experts think about policies and the middle classes, how the middle classes are taken into account when a new project is planned, and how they perceive the Thai middle classes and their actions.

After this last fieldwork was completed, there was still an ongoing debate on the Pheu Thai led government and its mega projects including flood

protection schemes and mass transit rail expansion projects, as to whether such projects were worthwhile, whether the government was capable of tackling these problems, and whether the government would be able to fix a stagnant economy and quell political instability. In fact, the Pheu Thai government introduced some mega projects to develop Bangkok into a Southeast Asian hub for many kinds of trade and commerce, emphasizing the need to modernise Bangkok, and solve its flooding problems. They seem to have gotten the pulse of Bangkok middle classes right as the two perennial problems that will always get their attention are traffic and flooding. Although they may seem to acquiesce and accept traffic congestion as a fact of life in Bangkok, they are less willing to accept flooding as an inevitable fact of life, even if they see this problem as more man-made than as a consequence of nature. How middle class residents respond to urban development projects such as the Bangkok SkyTrain (BTS), catchment area projects, and dredging canals and moats, were selected as specific issues to be further explored. In view of this, the second stage clarifies how this research explored middle class responses to urban development projects, especially in terms of solving critical problems and developing a meaning process of planning for the city and the BMR. With the exception of interviews conducted with academics, planners, journalists and policy makers located in the inner city, all fieldwork studies and in-depth interview questions to explore the middle classes were conducted in the two suburban areas of Bangna and Bangyai. Problems associated with the interview questions, the case study areas, interviewees, and the fieldwork itself, are described in the following section.

4.2.2 In-depth interview question guide

An in-depth interview question guide was created to help transform the research question and academic literature into a language that would allow data gathering from interviews. Questions needed to be simpler, yet at the same time, more interesting and inviting for interviewees. The interview guide became essential to gathering all the information from the interviews without missing any points. However, the use of an overtly formal interview was resisted as well as the temptation to create an academic discussion atmosphere

that may have been off-putting or seen as condescending to the interviewees. It was important that the interviewees feel that they could discuss the issues presented with the same level of comfort as they would with friends or relatives. The aim here was to provide the interviewees with an opportunity to answer in a free-flowing manner while providing high quality information. For these reasons, a semi-structured interview format was adopted for this research. The interview question set was structured into five mains sections: personal background, election issue-related,[8] planning- and flooding-related,[9] and BTS-related questions. The order in which some of the questions were asked varied depending on what the interviewee felt most eager to talk about first. This usually started with questions on personal background and the neighbourhood. Unless the interviewee felt strongly about a particular issue and wanted to jump ahead, this was usually the best way to break the ice and ensure that the participants felt relaxed. From this point, decisions on the next set of questions were made impromptu based on the direction the conversations flowed. This method helped see the issues with which the interviewee felt most comfortable without feeling coerced or pressured. The interviewees were encouraged to talk in their own words about what they wished to say about the projects or the issues at hand.

Since the fieldwork studies were divided into sections spread over three years, the circumstances in the field changed, and some conditions or focal points of each section of the fieldwork were slightly different. Therefore, the same question guide could not be used for each section and questions were tweaked to make them more suitable for each round. Ultimately, three separate sets of interview questions had to be designed; for the first fieldwork, fifteen questions were drawn up. They covered four main points: how the middle classes perceived and responded to the 2011 national election campaign and the victory of the Pheu Thai party; how they particularly perceived Thai politics and its ongoing political turmoil; how they viewed the idea of modernising during this period of political change; and, how they thought this affect

[8] This set of questions was only used in the 2011 fieldwork.
[9] This set of questions was only used in the 2012 and 2013 fieldwork.

Bangkok's urbanization prospects. There were eighteen questions for the second round in 2012, divided into five mains points: this time, the focus began on Bangkok's specific plans for urban development, and how this was shaped by the larger political scenario; to what extent was this endorsed by the middle classes even as the state projected them as middle-class projects, and how did they think such projects would survive becoming political puppets and actually solve the city's urbanization challenges. The last set of questions for the 2013 interviews comprised of more questions than the previous study periods because this stage of fieldwork was conducted for a follow-up result on how the middle classes saw the performance of the elected government and their specific electoral promises related to mass transit rail project and flood protection schemes. Thus, twenty-five questions were asked in this third stage of fieldwork. The question guide for this fieldwork expanded from the guide used in 2012. In 2013, questions were asked about how the interviewees saw themselves in the planning processes and how they evaluated the projects launched by the Pheu Thai government, including state-led urban development policies such as the BTS and flood protection schemes. However, new questions were asked about how the interviewees saw the BTS and MRT in their daily lives as these rail mass transit projects expanded deeper into the suburbs, and whether these projects had now been incorporated into their commuting patterns, even as many of them remain unrealised. As for the flood protection schemes, it was important to understand if the middle class respondents viewed flood protection schemes as extremely important, nearly two years after the severe flood of 2011, what they thought about progress on these schemes, and how they might involve themselves, if at all, in support of or in opposition to these schemes. Additional questions concerned opinions on the changing landscape of the BMR with regard to canals and changes in their use with regard to transportation and flood prevention. In summary, 2011 questions explored how the middle classes and its politics broadly placed Bangkok during a moment of intense political change. In 2012, questions focused on the middle classes and their urban development concerns following the 2011 national election. Questions used in 2013 were a follow-up to note any changes in middle class attitudes towards politics and urban development two years after the

election and one year after the severe floods of 2011. As a whole, the fieldwork explored, over a three-year period marked by significant changes in the political and urban landscape, middle class attitudes and actions towards state-led urban development policies and projects.

4.2.3 Research participants

As the aim of this research was to explore the socio-political role of the middle classes and how this group influences Bangkok's urban planning policies, ninety middle class residents from two middle class neighbourhoods in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) were interviewed alongside twenty-two academics, journalists, planners, policy makers, local community leaders, and mass transit rail providers. As discussed earlier, academics and professionals were not all interviewed at the same time. They were selected in conjunction with the most appropriate stage of the fieldwork as the interviews with the middle class residents progressed. In 2011, four academics and planners were interviewed before the first round of interviews with residents. A politician was also interviewed at this time. In 2012 and 2013, as the fieldwork became more focused on urban development projects and planning, more planners, policy makers and transportation providers were interviewed to retrieve up to date information and insider opinions. These interviews were helpful in the design of questions posed to middle class residents in 2012 and 2013. As mentioned earlier, a snowball sampling method was used to overcome difficulties in finding willing, middle class interviewees. In Thai society, it is difficult to get people, particularly those from the middle classes, to talk to a stranger. Thai middle classes are generally shy and wary of strangers. It is nearly impossible to approach someone on the street and ask them to talk or answer an interview. However, the ideal way to get them to open up and speak frankly is through a personal introduction that would make the interviewee more comfortable to speak with the interviewer. Hence, the use of snowball sampling to reach participants was used. At the same time, care was taken to ensure that interview residents of varied backgrounds were included, some of whom had little in common other than the neighbourhood in which they lived. This varied pool made it possible to cross check the reliability and credibility of concluding too

quickly any response as being middle-class specific as well as reduce any shortcomings of snowball sampling.

The fact that Thai middle classes are often quite adept at social networking also helped. A middle class person is usually proud to know, or at least have a passing acquaintance with someone who is doing well with their own endeavours and, is also mindful of neighbours who may not be so fortunate. A neighbourhood market vendor may 'know' a large variety of regular customers. Social connections are made and maintained through school, work and social activities such as weddings, temple fairs, charity events, sports, group tours, or merely by shopping and eating at the same places. By accessing interviewees' social networks, broad leads were generated. Interviewees eventually included a variety of different ages, genders, occupations and educational backgrounds. In this way, the risk of drawing conclusions based on a narrow set of interviews could be avoided.

Each of the two BMR middle class neighbourhoods has its own distinctive characteristics. Participants from each had different backgrounds and occupations, including civil servants, office workers, white-collar workers and self-employed individuals. Ages ranged from 22 to 65. Interviewees' level of education was also taken into consideration, as education is often an even more important factor than income in whether a Thai person self-identifies as middle class, as well as how others may perceive that person.

In fact, one must also take into account the Thai educational system. In particular, there are two points regarding the education of middle class BMR residents that should be considered: level of education and the Thai educational system in general. Firstly, free public education in Thailand is a fairly recent development. It is easy to find many lower middle class Bangkok citizens over the age of 50 who did not attend university or complete secondary school. Some may not read or write. Additionally, many middle class Bangkok citizens migrated from the provinces to the capital in their youth and did not have the educational opportunities in the provinces that were available in Bangkok. Level

and quality of education can be determining factors when considering access to government information and the choices people make with regard to the newspapers or television news programmes they prefer. Secondly, one should consider the Thai educational system in general. Even if some participants may have had the benefit of a complete secondary level education or university, they are still the products of the Thai educational system. The quality and character of the Thai educational system is a daily topic in the nation's news. Educational reform has become a buzzword and improvements to education are important planks in any political platform. Although efforts have been made by successive governments and bureaucrats to improve the quality of Thai education, Thai public school education in general may be characterised as rote learning with huge amounts of homework. There is little or no emphasis on creative thinking, expressing one's own opinion or problem solving. Out of respect for elders, Thai students would not dare question a teacher's authority or the value or veracity of the lesson taught. Such as system is perpetuated by teachers and administrators who were educated under the same system. Middle class Thais enrol their children to the best schools they can afford, as education is seen as the key to success. For upper middle class Thais who can afford international schools or private schools, of which there are many in the BMR, these schools would be the preferred choice over public schools. So how does the Thai educational system influence the participants and their responses in this research? If the emphasis is on rote learning with little or no attention paid to expressing one's own opinion, would those with lesser years in the Thai educational system be more willing and open to express their personal opinions or, would their opinions simply be shaped by the information and media they choose? Additionally, if the Thai educational system emphasises 'getting the right answer' over developing one's own problem-solving abilities, how could this affect responses? These issues, some subtle and others not so subtle, were taken into account. Besides the backgrounds of the participants, location of the participants' homes was also taken into consideration. Interviewees live different distances from the nearest BTS station, some within a convenient distance and some residing in homes that were not so convenient. The assumption here was that close proximity to an extended BTS station or to a

proposed BTS station would indicate greater support of the BTS system and its planned extensions. It also opened the opportunity for interviewees to express how they felt about the BTS in general, how it has affected their lives since it opened, and how they expect BTS projects will affect their lives in the future.

As mentioned earlier the primary steer of this thesis in terms of identifying the middle class was more in terms of qualitative factors rather than quantitative data. Since the focus was on the capturing the increasingly polarised lower and upper middle classes, as a first step, spatial selection was used to pick two neighbourhoods broadly catering to the two ends of the middle class spectrum. This was done through conversations with 'knowledgeable local's including journalists and academics who provided some guidance in terms of the socio-economic characteristics of some of Bangkok's well-distinguished and delineated neighbourhoods. This was supplemented by on site observation and field note-keeping where mostly qualitative differences in the two neighbourhoods (Bangna and Bangyai) were observed and recorded (Table 4-1). There were some obvious differences, the most prominent being that Bangna is more urbanised than Bangyai, the later considered as a peri-urban neighbourhood against the centrality of Bangna's location. Since, political ideologies of the middle classes was a crucial aspect of this research, it was important to also establish whether the lower and upper middle classes were clearly differentiated in terms of their party loyalties. The supposition that upper middle class residents in Bangna were Yellow Shirt sympathisers while Bangyai's lower middle classes would support the Red Shirts was broadly upheld by the national election results in the two neighbourhoods. In addition, an initial survey of several households asked residents to self-identify their social category and not surprisingly, most in Bangna chose to consider themselves as upper middle class while those in Bangyai were more comfortable indicating that they were from the lower end of the middle class.

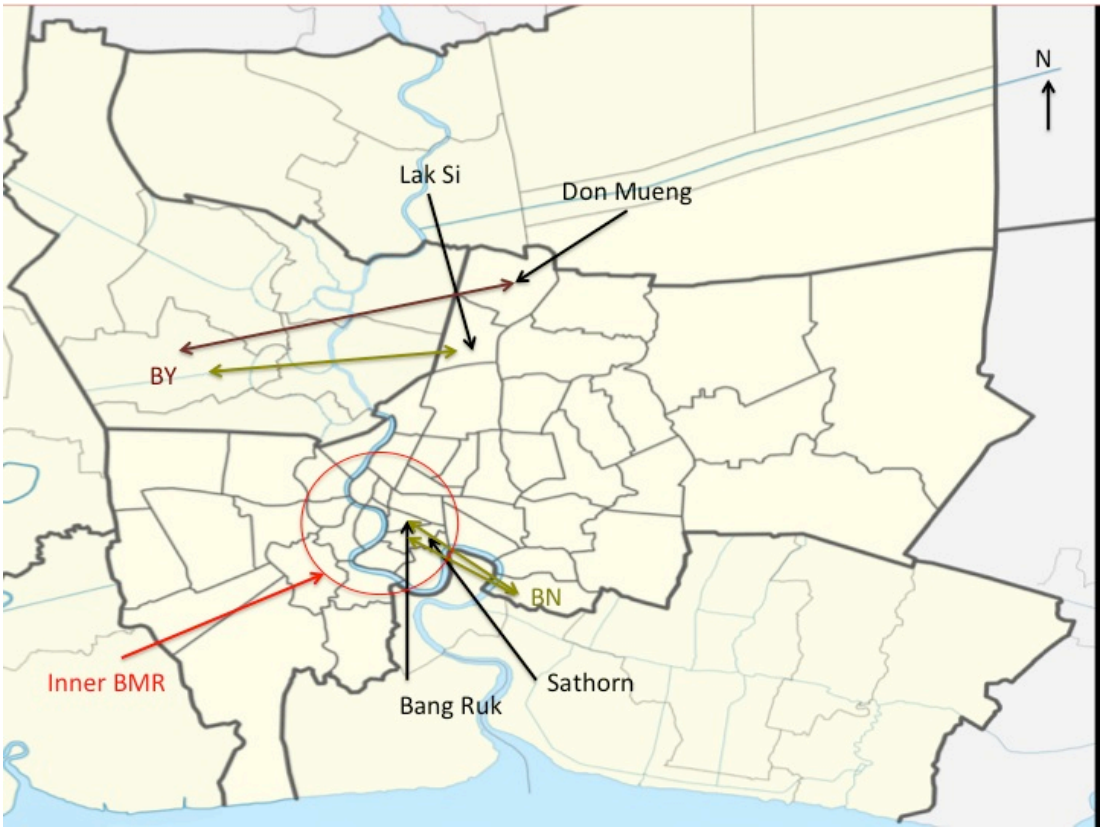
Table 4-1: Characteristics of the two case study neighbourhoods

	Bangna	Bangyai
General environment	• No orchards or rice fields • Not eligible for Water transportation • Full access to basic infrastructure i.e. water supply, electricity, high-speed internet	• Having orchards and rice fields • Eligible for Water transportation • Partial access to basic infrastructure i.e. water supply, electricity, high-speed internet
Housing characteristics	• Most houses are in gated communities • Traditional Thai – style houses can hardly be founded	• Most houses are in plotted neighbourhoods that are not gated and sometimes are even spontaneous as a development. • Traditional Thai – style houses can be founded
Occupation	• Higher-end white collar workers • Professionals • Self – employed • Small business owners	• Lower grade civil servants • Self – employed • Low salaried white collar workers
Working Area	• Mostly inner city centre i.e. Bang Ruk and Sathorn district, which are financial and business centre of BMR (See Figure 4-2)	• Mostly in the peripheries such as Don Mueng and Lak Si District, which are second centre of government office and another business district of BMR (See Figure 4-2)
Education Background[10]	• Bachelor degree or higher	• High - school • Bachelor degree
Lifestyle	• More than one car in a household • Luxurious car users • Expensive gated communities • Enjoy activities in the city centre as well prominent leisure activities such as golf club memberships • Some have condominium in the city centre for weekdays	• Not many luxurious car users. • Enjoy activities in the local area i.e. nearby department store, local markets, home activities • Have only one home. • No condominium in the city centre
Political Support	Yellow Shirt supporter	Red Shirt supporter

Source: Based on researcher's field notes

[10] This information bases on researcher's note during her observation.

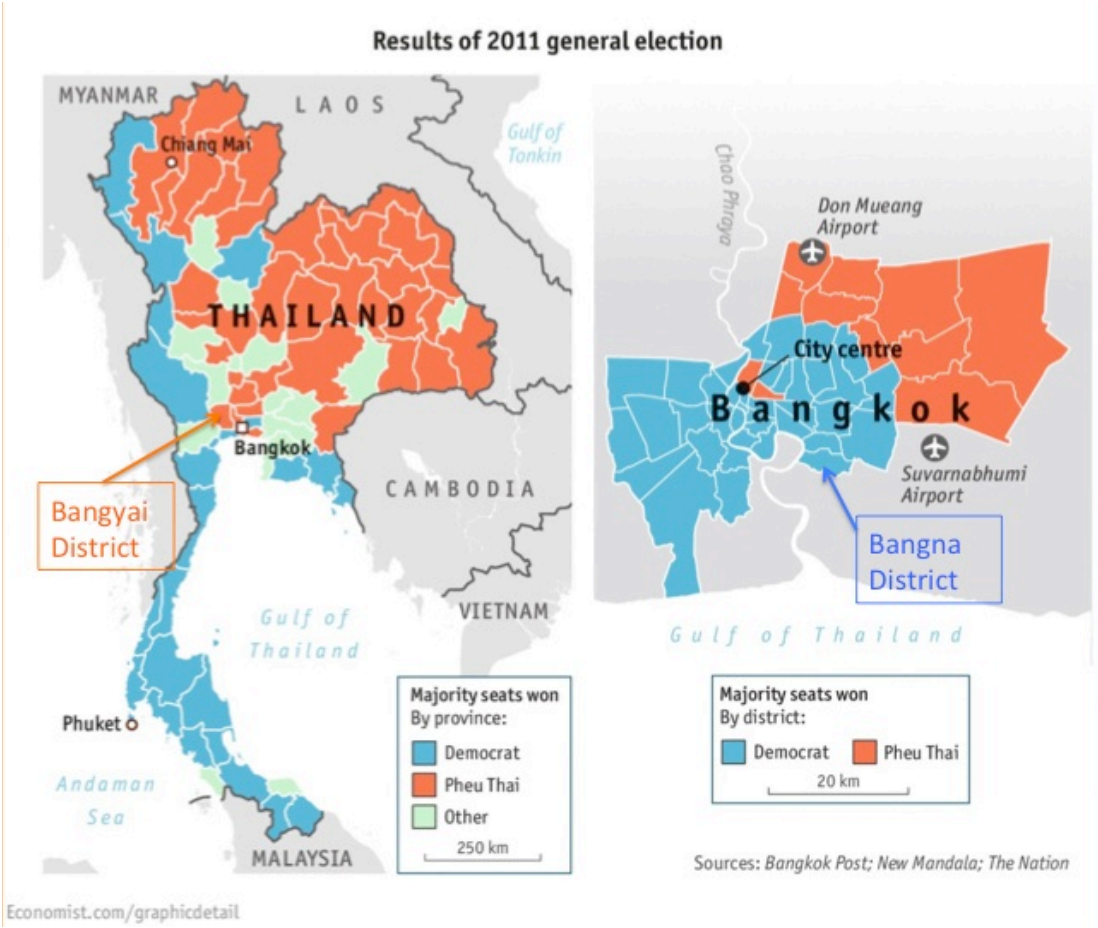
Figure 4-2: Working Areas of Most Bangyai (BY) and Bangna (BN) citizens



Source: Base Map, Wikipedia (n.d.), modified by researcher

The 2011 election result is one of the most obvious evidence affirming the upper middle class nature of Bangna (yellow shirt, opposite Pheu Thai Party) while confirming Bangyai as a lower middle class neighbourhood (red shirt, supprt Pheu Thai Party). Many Thai scholars and observers such as Eawsriwong (2010), Sonttisumphan (2010), Sathiniramai (2010), Satayanuruk (2014) have tended to rely on this simple categorisation where they find Bangkok's upper middle class to be opposed to Pheu Thai Party and in favour of the Yellow Shirts while the lower middle class tend to remain in support of the Red Shirts and the Pheu Thai party (Figure 4-3).

Figure 4-3: 2011 Election Result Map



Source: Regional Geography (2010)

In the absence of a systematic household survey within the BMR, average monthly household income information was used at the province level, with Bangkok and Nonthaburi provinces representing the average income for Bangna and Bangyai (Table 4-2). At nearly 25 per cent more than Bangyai, it is hard to conclusively argue that Bangna's residents might fall in the upper middle class category even though their lifestyle choices based on on-site observation might suggest the same. Thus, income criteria remains only a rough indicator, as a result of which field site selection had to rely on a more qualitative approach.

Table 4-2: Median of Average Income Per Household During 2006 - 2015

	Bangna	**Bangyai**
Average Monthly Income per household during 2006 - 2015	37416.70 Baht[11] (748.33 GBP)	30,574.30 Baht[12] (611.40 GBP)

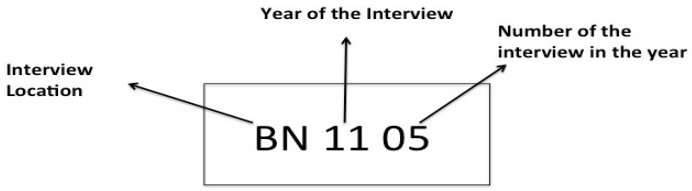
Source: National Statistic Organization (n.d.)

All the interviews are used anonymously through a careful system of tagging to ensure that none of the participants are identified by their names. Each interviewee has been assigned a participant tag, indicating whether they are residents or expert interviewees, with further details including the year of interview, date and the participant's location. The tag prefix is a participant's location. BY stands for Bangyai and BN stands for Bangna. The suffix is the year of interview and the numerical order of when the interview was conducted (see Figure 4-4).

[11] Rate 50 Baht per £1.

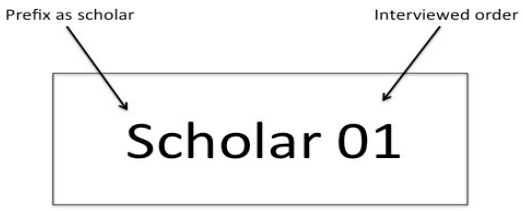
[12] Rate 50 Baht per £1.

Figure 4-4: Participant tag



For expert interviewees (see Figure 4-5), the tag includes 'scholars' and 'number'. Since many of them were interviewed more than once (please see Appendix 3), the number indicates the interview order.

Figure 4-5: Scholar tag



4.2.4 Case study areas

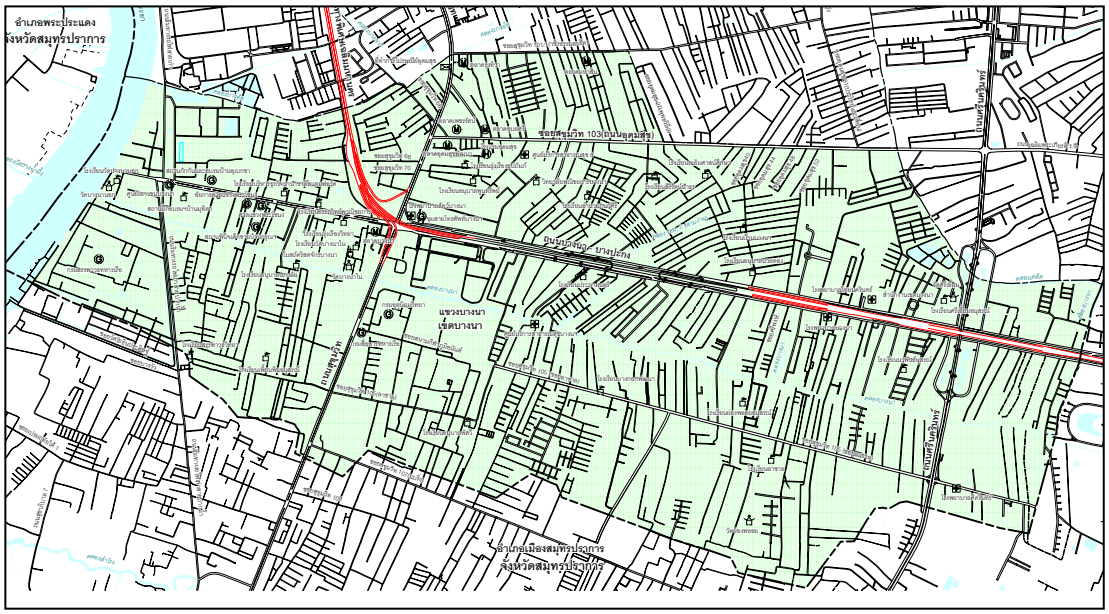
> "When there is even less in one particular case, a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition. I call this a multiple case study or collective case study." (Stake 2005:445 cited in Thomas 2014:141)

A multiple case study aims to dig deeper in order to undertake a more thorough analysis of the culture, responses and character of participants from two or more environments. However, using multiple studies does not mean that the results will re-invoke the need for representative samples of each phenomenon (Thomas 2014). Multiple case studies examine multiple phenomena from several environments and compare through a process of cross-case analysis (Schwandt 2001). Given the acute polarization of the Thai middle classes in the wake of its political transformations, it was important that this bifurcation (even at a simple level) be acknowledged and hence it became pertinent to study the lower and upper middle classes as distinct middle class reactions to political instability and its impact on Bangkok's urban development agenda.

Thus, middle class participants were chosen from two different middle class neighbourhoods: Bangyai District and Bangna District. These two middle class BMR neighbourhoods were initially chosen because of a few apparent similarities, firstly, the residents are middle class. The two districts have some commonalities and some differences. Combined together and compared, they provide a good overall picture of Bangkok's suburban middle class. Both Bangyai and Bangna are located on the urban fringe of BMR, in fairly reasonable commuting distance to the inner city, and most residents of each district look forward to expanded BTS services, even if some problems must be endured during the development. Both have been subject to some degree of urbanisation as the city expands outward and to the east. As part of this urbanisation process, each of these neighbourhoods, in their own ways, has been subject to the development of mega-transportation and mass-transit projects built, or to be built, in their neighbourhoods. This study further examines whether different middle class political opinions and loyalties, different living arrangements and environments, subject to similar mega-transportation projects passing through these neighbourhoods reveal distinct socio-political positionalities towards urban planning and policies of the city and its extended metropolitan region. This section aims to explain why these neighbourhoods were chosen, how they are different in some ways, and how they are similar. The different political attitudes and loyalties of the residents of each neighbourhood are also explained. The characteristics of the two middle class neighbourhoods chosen illustrate why they were selected as case study sites.

Bangna District

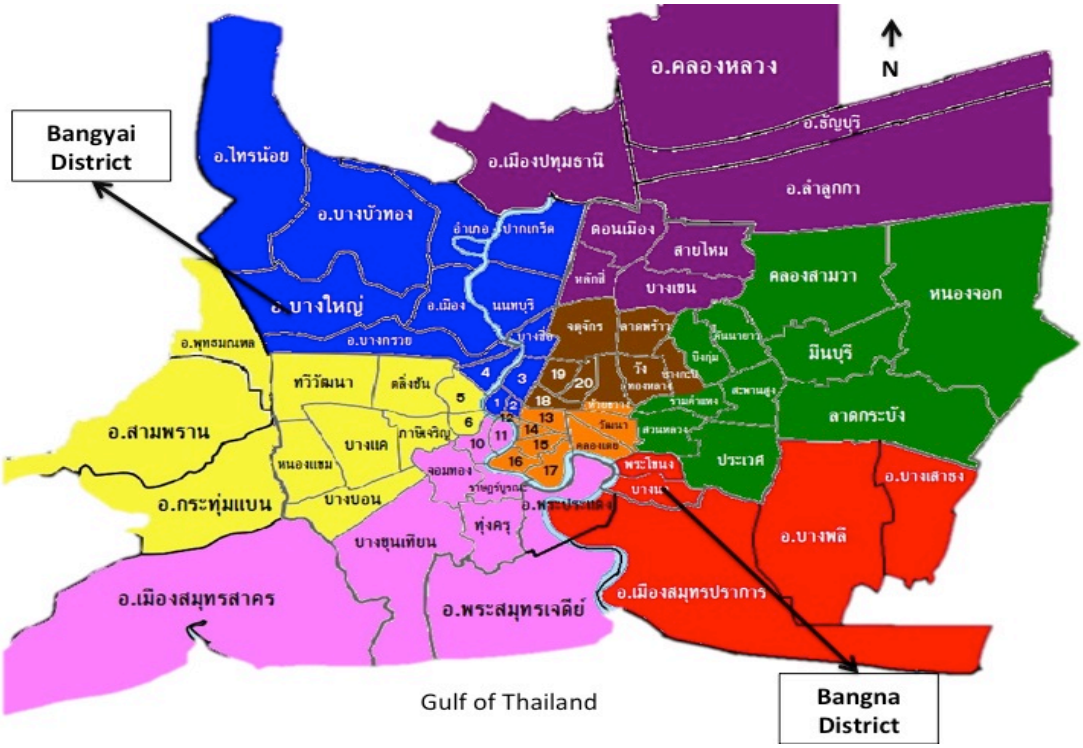
Figure 4-6: Bangna District map



Source: Department of City Planning (n.d.)

Bangna District (Figure 4-6) is located on the eastern fringe of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) (see Figure 4-7). Although both Bangna and Bangyai Districts are located on this fringe, Bangna is closer to Bangkok, on the inner fringe. This is one easy and obvious reason as to why Bangna shows characteristics of being more urbanised than Bangyai. Bangna was gradually urbanised over a 30-year period or more and its residents tend to identify more with inner-city Bangkokians. Bangna continues to urbanise through a specific trajectory where now as its development projects include many department stores, high-rise buildings and fewer fields and orchards. Figure 4-8 illustrates some parts of Bangna to show the extent of urbanisation in this district.

Figure 4-7: Bangna and Bangyai Districts Location in BMR



Source: Nerbnarb (2010)

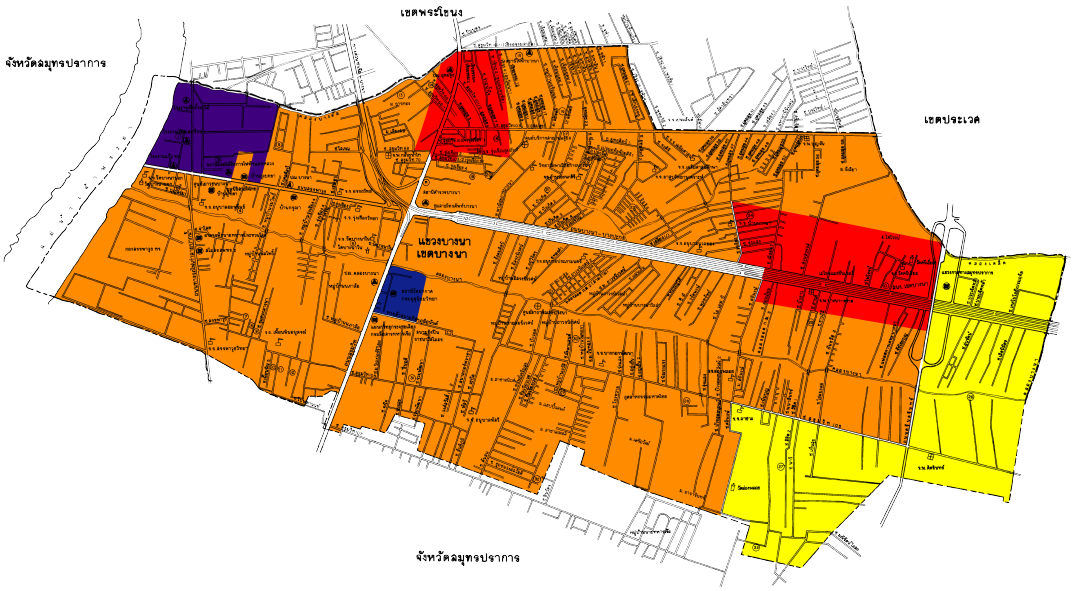
Figure 4-8: Examples of Bangna District Environment

Source: Top and bottom left photos by the Researcher, 15 Auguest 2013, top right by Wikimapia (n.d.) and bottom left by Secco (n.d.)

Besides being an inner fridge district, Bangna is located on the main traffic corridor between Bangkok and the Eastern Seaboard, one of the main industrial areas of the country. Bangna straddles the main expressway and motorway routes from the inner city of Bangkok to the industrial estates and upper middle class gated communities of Bangna, leading all the way to Suvarnabhumi (Bangkok International Airport), and then connecting Bangkok with the economic powerhouses of Samutprakarn and Chonburi Provinces, including maritime shipping facilities, a deep-water port, and the tourist destination of Pattaya. In short, due to its geographical location and massive development supported by government policies over the past few decades, almost anywhere in Bangna may be considered prime real estate.

There are other reasons for choosing Bangna. First of all, construction of the BTS SkyTrain extension into Bangna was planned and scheduled to open about one year after the 2011 national election. Additional BTS extensions in other parts of the BMR were also planned and completed. Extensions of the BTS are extremely popular with middle class Bangkok commuters and voters. As mentioned earlier, all major political parties in the 2011 national election promised some level of support for these projects. Also, BTS extensions benefit property owners whose land value increases, and developers rush in often with plans to build new condominiums and office buildings around the new stations. Locations become more desirable when they have a BTS station. Existing businesses in the area benefit from increased customers and some businesses having their headquarters in the inner city may find it worthwhile to open more branches in Bangna. Entirely new local businesses may also be created. Bangna residents may have a very strong and positive attitude regarding the BTS extension into their neighbourhood. Secondly, Bangna is a mixed-use land area that includes commercial, industrial and residential projects.

Figure 4-9: Bangna District urban planning land use map



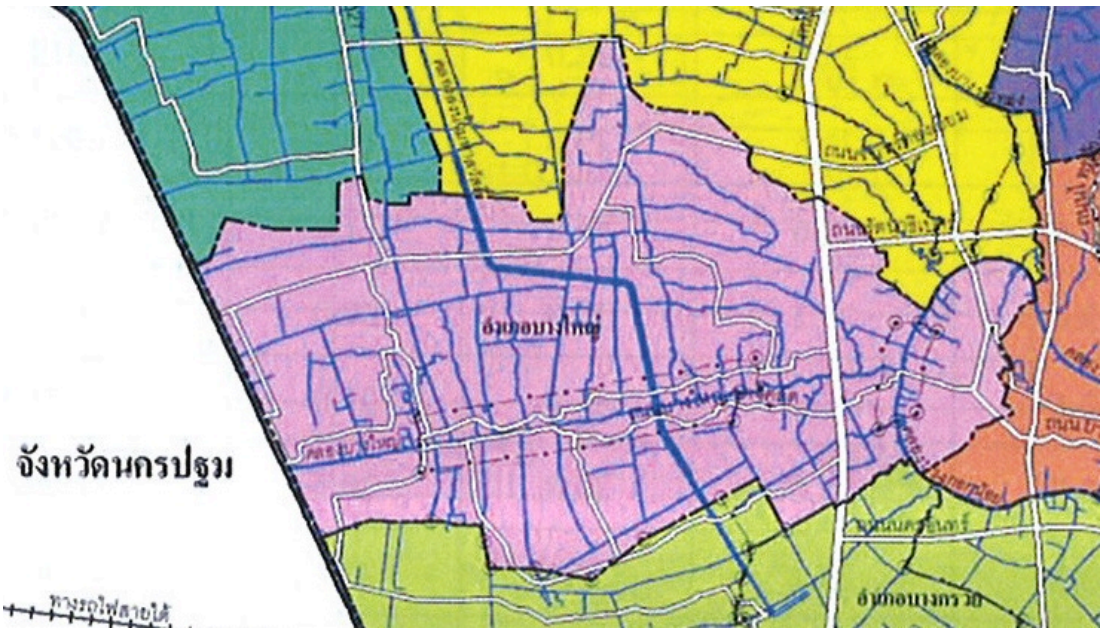
Source: Department of City Planning (n.d.)

Figure 4-9 represents the land use urban plan for the Bangna District with purple indicating industrial areas, red representing commercial zones and orange showing middle density residential zones. The yellow area in the east represents a low density residential zone. The dark blue areas are where government offices are located. Although the government divides Bangna District into zones, actual land use is so not clearly drawn. There are some commercial activities in the orange zones reserved as middle density residential zones, and there is some housing in the red commercial zones. This mixed land use occurs throughout the district. As discussed in Chapter 2, Bangkok has no clearly spelt land use zoning, and the authorities can grant exceptions or variances on an ad hoc basis. In general, Bangna can be described as a district with middle class residential zones mixed with other land use zones as defined by the government. Due to its proximity to Bangkok, on the urbanised inner fridge, Bangna has many development projects related to middle class comfort, including single-family homes, which many residents would not be able to afford in the inner city. Many Bangna residents can be characterised as upper middle and upper class and largely supporters of Thai-style democracy. Thus, they are more likely to be Yellow Shirt supporters. This political characteristic

was the final reason to select Bangna as one of the case study areas. It would be impossible to categorise any district of Bangkok as purely Yellow or Red Shirt, and it is possible to find Red and Yellow Shirt supporters living side by side or, even within the same family, under one roof. However, with its gated communities, above average incomes, support for the monarchist 'Thai-style' democracy, it would be fair to say that the majority of Bangna residents are Yellow Shirt supporters.

Bangyai

Figure 4-10: Bangyai District map



Source: Nonthaburi Province Office of Public Works and Town and Country Planning (2012)

To cross-reference with Bangna District, the second case study area chosen was Bangyai in Nonthaburi Province, which is the lavender area in Figure 4-10. Bangyai is situated in the northwest part of the BMR (Figure 4-7). It is on the outer fringe of the BMR, which is less urbanised than Bangna. As with Bangna District, an extension of the BTS SkyTrain system, one of the central urban development projects related to this study, was also planned for Bangyai and was expected to open around the same time as the extension into Bangna District. There is still a countryside feeling in Bangyai, with its many canals, large and small, still used for transportation. While it has taken more than 30

years for Bangna to reach its present state of development, any significant development in Bangyai has occurred within the last decade or so. This difference in the degree of urbanisation between more developed Bangna and less developed Bangyai, and the differences in how quickly each area became urbanised to any extent, certainly seems to have contributed to the political differences seen in each neighbourhood. Hence, most of the commercial and residential development in Bangyai is more recent than in Bangna, and Bangyai is still less urbanised and developed.

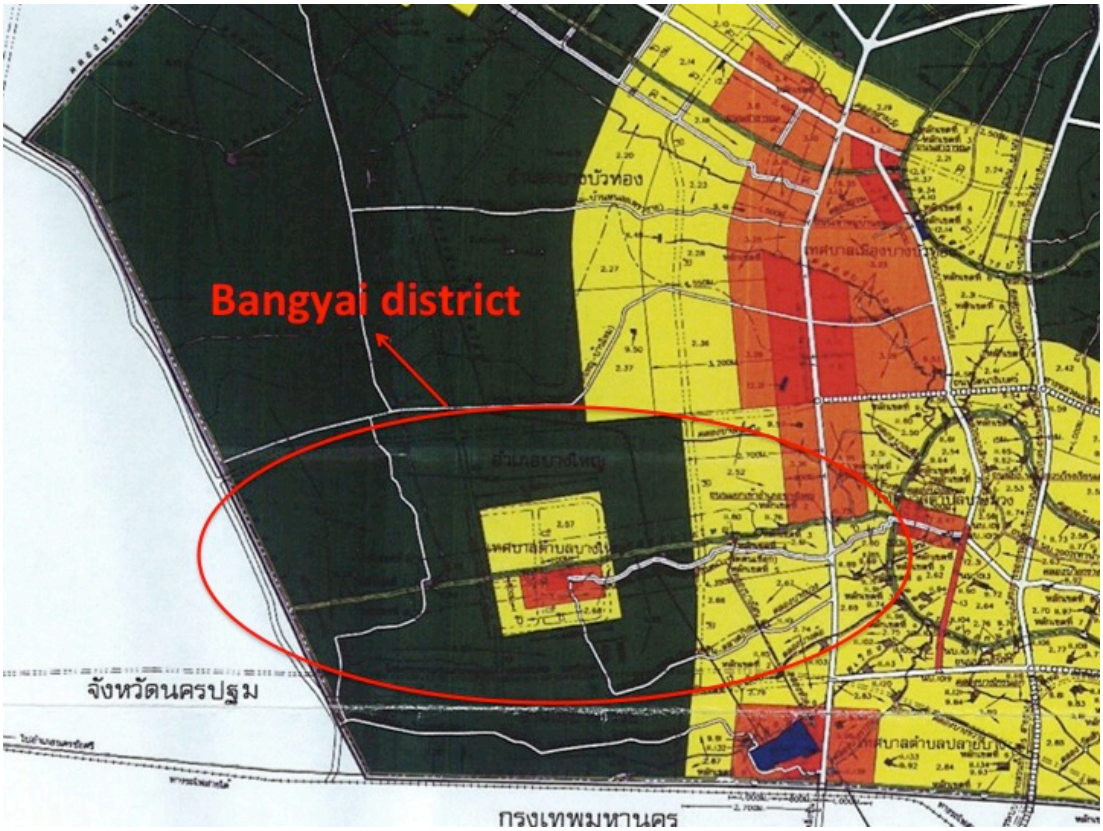
Just as Bangna is the gateway to the east, Bangyai is the gateway to the northwest. Bangyai is by no means as important a gateway as Bangna, which links Bangkok and the Eastern Seaboard. However, it is certain that Bangyai will become much more developed in the near future. Bangyai is conveniently located near many of the newer central government buildings to the northwest of downtown Bangkok. During the last 20 years, many government ministries and agencies relocated to the northwest BMR, to relieve traffic congestion in the inner city and to house many related agencies nearby to each other to improve workflow. The massive Chaeng Wattana Goverment Centre, covering about 140 acres and built at the cost of 20 billion baht, opened in 2008. The Department of Special Investigation, the Ministry of Commerce, the Thai Post, and other agencies are close-by. Naturally, when the government relocated many government agencies, private businesses followed. Bank branches, retail stores, apartment buildings and other businesses providing needed goods and services. Professionals who often interact with the government, including lawyers, architects and accountants, considered relocation or opening branch offices. Bangyai District became a convenient place to live for anyone working around Chang Wattana and nearby areas. Continuing on to the northwest, a motorway is planned to link Bangkok with Kanchanaburi Province and then on to the massive Dawei Deep-Water Seaport project under construction in Myanmar. Infrastructure projects and government policies, or at least the promise of the same, have transformed Bangyai into becoming one of the most popular areas in the BMR for real estate development. Although Bangyai is not yet quite as developed as Bangna, it is well on its way.

Figure 4-11: Example of some area in Bangyai District Environment

Source: Researcher (8 August 2012)

Figure 4-11 provides a feel of Bangyai as a neighbourhood. Some houses are still traditional Thai style homes of wood and concrete. The district is laced with canals because many residents still pursue a peri-urban agricultural occupation, tending to orchards and rice fields. Similar to the realities seen in Bangna, Bangyai does not, in fact, have clear land-use zones. Mixed land-use is a common feature in the BMR. However, the land use planning of Bangyai is slightly different.

Figure 4-12: Bangyai District urban land use map



Source: Nonthaburi Province Office of Public Works and Town and Country Planning (2012)

Bangyai district does not have warehouses, government offices or commercial zones. As can be seen in Figure 4-12, most of Bangyai is designated as rural and agricultural land-use, represented in the dark grean area, and low density residential zones, represented in yellow. Only a small area is designated as a medium density residential zone, represented in red. Figure 4-12 confirms that Bangyai is less urbanised than Bangna. Also, in contrast to Bangna, the majority of Bangyai District residents are more likely to be Red Shirt supporters as given their recent migration to the city, Bangyai residents tend to identify more with provincial Thais and the lower middle classes. They are more suspicious of elites and inner city Bangkokians, and have more faith in provincial politics, characterised as a rule by well connected, local leaders. Thus, they are more likely to be Red Shirt supporters. As with Bangna, which cannot be portrayed as entirely an Yellow Shirt territory, Bangyai cannot be deemed to be completely occupied by Red shirts. However, one may say that Bangyai residents tend to be lower middle class, Red Shirt supporters. The different political tendencies of

these two BMR neighbourhoods provided some insight into these two groups of middle-class BMR residents in relation to politics and urban development. Each of these two political camps has their own distinctive viewpoints with regard to government, mega projects, urban planning and urban development.

4.2.5 Implications and issues encountered during the fieldwork

Entering the field often introduces experiences, problems or issues for researchers, since research does not always go as planned. Conducting research on the middle classes, their politics, and the context of urban development in their city during a period of political instability presented some issues and problems that required skill to carefully adapt strategies in the field to ensure the reliability and validity of data collected. This section discusses the problems encountered and their implications during the three stages of fieldwork and how they were addressed. The three main problematic issues that came more clearly into focus that emerged during this research were the multiple identities within the Thai middle class, the sensitive issue of politics and Thai middle class habits.

4.2.5.1 Thai middle class identity

As argued in Chapter 3, the Thai middle classes cannot be clearly defined by any firm definition, the middle class as a whole occupying a very broad social strata between the poor and the rich. There have been efforts by scholars to disaggregate this 'bulky' category by dividing them either into the old and the new, or the lower and upper middle classes. As a result, it is possible that a person or household may identify with more than one division of the middle class and the dividing lines are not always clear. However, the main focus of the fieldwork was not middle class classification, but rather to look at middle class attitudes towards urban planning and politics, and how BMR residents chose to participate in such processes. Although there was no real counting of the exact number of participants who identified themselves as 'red' or 'yellow', it became clear from the interviews that while broadly, those who shared similar political views also shared similar attitudes towards urban development, there were

underlying layers of complexity that would discourage from making such straightforward conclusions. Additionally, the fragmentation of the middle class came into clearer focus after the data was analysed. This is discussed later in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.2.5.2 Politics, a very sensitive issue

One of the key objectives of this research was to unravel the politics of the Thai middle classes, a sensitive issue that most of them avoid discussing. When some of the interview questions asked directly about politics, some interviewees tried to avoid answering those questions directly, openly or honestly. To most Thais, political and government related issues are sensitive topics to be discussed with family or close friends. Even so, when talking with friends and family in public, political conversations are usually kept to a minimum. Such reactions and attitudes about political discussions may sound strange to the western world; however, this kind of reluctance to discuss sensitive issues is deeply rooted in Thai culture. Young people are taught that because politics is based on one's own beliefs, discussion should be avoided because it can lead to fruitless arguments (Thuaprakhon 2010). Political discussions may even lead to angry confrontations. If Thai politics is discussed rationally, without emotion, it will lead to a deeper understanding of society and other speakers' opinions (*ibid*.). Even though a deeper understanding may be gained from rational discussion and listening to others' opinions may deter misunderstanding and anger, it is still difficult to get most middle class Thais to openly discuss politics.

In Thai society, manners are important, and no one wants to intentionally offend another person. A conversation on political issues with a stranger outside the somewhat safe environment of academic debate can prove to be uncomfortable and daunting. In this research, efforts had to be taken to make interviewees feel comfortable with questions about politics and this was done by mostly asking indirect questions to get to them to relax. Sometimes, the order of the questions had to be changed. For instance, questions about the BTS extension into Bangna could be used in interviews with residents to open the door for questions on broader issues related to urban planning, policies and

development. Moreover, beginning interviews with fairly soft questions about the BTS made the interviewees feel more comfortable to talk about more sensitive issues later on, including how politics figures into urban policy and planning processes and how they respond to such policies. It became tricky when some interviewees challenged the researcher to reveal their own position vis a vis the participants, almost as if they would be comfortable with expressing their opinions only if they were reassured that this was in the presence of someone sharing their beliefs and ideals. This proved to a huge challenge at several points during fieldwork.

4.2.5.3 Thai beliefs and habits

Thai beliefs and habits were also quite frustrating to navigate but often one has to remind oneself that diplomacy, tact and deference are needed to break down or get around these habits to obtain good quality and reliable data from the interviewees. This was challenging. Simply getting enough interviewees was difficult. Thai society is very hierarchical and a patronage system is still very much alive in some sectors of society, leaving one to find ways of getting through doors that would have otherwise been shut. Thais usually want to feel some kind of connection to a person with whom they are speaking face to face. Even the slightest connection can help break the ice. If one Thai reveals to another that his or her cousin attended the same university at around the same time or, if their grandparents once lived in the same part of town, there is the beginning of some kind of bond formation and a certain level of comfort and trust may be established.

Secondly, appearance is very important in interviews. The prospective interviewee will first examine the interviewer's outward appearance, including clothes, accessories, and body language. Then, perhaps even more importantly, they will listen carefully. Middle-aged and older Thais usually expect younger adults to address them with a certain degree of deference and respect, regardless of social standing and even if the age difference is not so great. Thais are taught to use a very different manner and vocabulary when speaking with an older person compared to how they may speak with their peers. Therefore,

the need to dress properly to gain respect and trust was constantly kept in mind, in addition to reminding oneself to be careful with the language used during the interview. Sometimes use of an endearing term such as uncle, sister, grandma or aunt, can help create a connection between the interviewer and interviewee. It is not only to show respect to the interviewee, but it also creates familiarity, which may lead to a more frank and open discussion. Another problem that occurred in some interviews was that the interviewee did not fully understand a question, but did not ask for clarification. It is normal for Thais to refrain from asking questions about something they do not understand as they might not want to appear ignorant or uninformed. If such a situation was revealed, they would *sia-nar* (lose face). So, rather than asking for clarification, they may prefer to continue with the interview, even if they did not understand the previous question. When most Thais are asked questions or are asked to do something, even if they do not understand, they will still try to answer based on their own assumptions (Niratpattanasai n.d.). Thus, it was critical that participants were tactfully checked constantly to ensure they had understood the question by asking additional, repetitive and sometimes indirect questions.

The last problem revealed in interviews was that the interviewees sometimes assumed that, with a shared language and culture, the researcher already understood what they implied, or that they did not directly express. These kinds of assumptions by interviewees are not exclusive to Thais. This may occur anywhere when interviewees feel that they have a shared community experience with the interviewer. Interviewees sometimes expect that interviewers share common experiences, since there is no concretely revealed position that shows an interviewer's social standing, for example (Rose 1997). As a result, middle class participants in this study sometimes assumed that the researcher already understood what they talking about and no explanation were given. The researcher had to be on constant alert to acknowledge this at which point we need to dig deeper by asking further questions. Such a tactic was consistently used to avoid any misunderstanding.

4.3 Data analysis

A primary and secondary data analysis helped build a critical socio-political view of middle class discourse in the transformation of Bangkok and how this eventually writes itself back into the city's urban development agenda. Consequently, the analysis sought to uncover the overall association between middle class politics and urbanisation in the BMR. In this research, some secondary data has been used to complement primary data material. The Great Bangkok Plan 2533, Master Rail Mass Transit System Map, Statistics of PAD and UDD participants, World Bank Thailand Economic Record (i.e. GDP Growth Rate, Thailand Urban Populations) are some examples of secondary data used in this research. Moreover, analysis of secondary data, including government documents on urban development projects, government policies and existing research on the urbanisation of Bangkok was undertaken to supplement primary data from fieldwork. To analyse primary data and secondary data, coding methods and content analysis of several policy and planning documents were used. Primary data was collected from 112 interviews, and notes were taken for all 112, 87 of which were recorded electronically. It would have been great to record all of the interviews to retrieve the nuances of voice, emotion, and actual terms and phrases used to add depth to the data. Nevertheless, detailed notes from the 12 unrecorded interviews proved more than adequate. The consciousness of the researcher must interact in collaboration with participants that are recorded as fully and as correctly as possible (Seidman 1998). To guarantee the integrity of the primary data, verbatim transcriptions of the electronically recorded interviews were used. Some researchers pick up some relevant parts of an interview and transcribe only that part. However, working with the whole set of data is important for this study (Briggs 1986), and therefore interviews were transcribed verbatim. A 60-90 minute interview took 4-6 hours to transcribe. Additional notes were made on unrecorded interviews the same day as the interview was undertaken while still fresh in memory. Transcribing is a very time intensive process, but worthwhile in the long term.

Separating interviews and analysis avoids placing meaning from one interviewee to another (Seidman 1998). After transcribing the data, the analysis and interpretation followed. Transcripts were read with an open mind to analyse what was important and interesting. A researcher is unable to address data withholding a hypothesis set to match the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). After reading through, the processes of noting interesting points, labelling them, and categorising them into appropriate themes followed. This process is referred to as classifying or coding data; a thematic connection to an analytical approach. Using a thematic connection to analyse data is to look for association threads and forms amongst those data and classify them into themes (Seidman 1998). Coding was conducted in the form of one-word, keyword codes, and keyword phrases, such as 'election policy', 'need SkyTrain extension project' and 'money politics'. There are two types of codes. Deductive codes are related to the initial aim of the research study while inductive codes emerge from the data itself (Seale 2008). There are benefits to both ways of constructing a code set, so both deductive codes and inductive codes were applied. When the coding process was completed, an analysis was reported by summarising the predominant codes and discussing the differences and similarities in coding relations across all interview documents determined the results of the analysis. Thematic connection analysis, or categories, are fundamental in contributing to a path of research analysis, using an interpretive approach to create meaning formulated by the interviewees (Thomas 2014). Moreover, verbatim quotations were used throughout this thesis to capture the real expressions and feelings from the direct speech of participants with as close a translation as possible, without rephrasing. These direct quotes were included to supplement my interpretation and analytical results.

In addition to the interpretation of primary data from the field, content analysis was used to interpret the secondary data. This approach aimed to supplement the results from primary data and use insightful, secondary data to support the overall arguments of this research. It mainly involved the examination of official discourses related to Bangkok's transformation through several planning proposals and projects. Such an analysis helped shed light on

various situations that influenced socio-political changes directly affecting the middle classes in Bangkok, and evaluate the city's urban transformation. Three important situations, namely, the economic crisis of 1997, the more recent so-called pro-democracy movement in Bangkok and the 2011 national election, and the 2011 flooding crisis in Bangkok are analysed. These events certainly had economic and political implications that could very well influence middle class responses in relation to questions regarding Bangkok's urban development. Although this method may be seen as lacking in terms of a concrete, standard approach, it is widely used in analysing advertisements, newspapers, media, government policies and government projects. This method is compatible with this study because this study also considered the analysis of newspapers, critical writing, government policies and government projects. The analytical process of discourse analysis tends to be data driven and different researchers adopt approaches from a variety of frameworks (Seale 2008), so it is difficult to settle any standard approach for this method. Nevertheless, this allows the collection of valuable material from a number of sources, with attention paid to how the research questions were conceptualised.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed insight into the methodologies employed during this research's fieldwork. Qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and discourse analysis, was identified to be central methods of this study exploring Thai middle class responses to ongoing debates on Thai politics and how these influence middle class reactions to Bangkok's urban development agenda. This was chosen as central because of a conviction that it provides an effective tool to retrieve rich data on social and environmental issues from the Bangkok middle classes. Relying on in-depth interviews, qualitative methods became a way of collecting a rich data related to social and cultural contexts at independent sites and situations (Baxter and Eyles 1997). In-depth interviews were set as the central pillars for the fieldwork data collection. By preparing the interview question guides and sample data selection, it became apparent that the actual fieldwork required on-site problem solving and 'tweaking'. After a few days in the field, it became apparent that

despite good methodology and fieldwork preparation, unforeseen problems are bound to occur. The sampling selection required snowball sampling for middle class participants because Thai middle classes are famously reluctant in talking to strangers. Adjustments thus had to be made to the strategies used to reach middle class participants by obtaining personal introductions to the interviewees through friends, colleagues and neighbours from the initial participants in each BMR neighbourhood.

To understand the socio-political roles of the middle classes and how this influences or contributes to Bangkok's urban development, fieldwork studies were set up in two Bangkok neighbourhoods, Bangna and Bangyai. These two different middle class neighbourhoods were selected for cross-referencing interview results from the different extremities of the middle classes. As one district is more urbanised than the other, middle class residents from each of these two neighbourhoods gave distinctively different opinions on urban planning related issues. Questions were asked about how middle class people perceive Thai politics, how they respond to Bangkok's urbanisation, and how the middle classes expect Bangkok be developed.

Besides selecting two sites, fieldwork evolved over a three year period, almost in an unanticipated manner. It almost became a longitudinal study, one that was nevertheless critical to understanding middle class responses over a period of time. As discussed in Chapter 3, middle class action is usually preceded by concerns for their own prosperity and safety, the 3-year period for fieldwork allowed me to explore the connection between having concern and taking action over this 3-year period, which proved to be tumultuous for Bangkok citizens. In addition, any progress on government projects could be reconsidered in terms of how this may affect middle class feelings towards such projects. Secondary data collected was used to supplement the primary data. Secondary data was most important at the initial stages of the research before the interviews with the middle class and then again, during the research analysis. Primary data was analysed by using thematic connection coding and direct quotations from the participants. Secondary data was analysed by using

discourse analysis. The methodology explained in this chapter produced the findings of this research on how middle class BMR residents talk about their politics and what their attitudes are towards urban development and planning processes. The empirical findings produced from the fieldwork are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 5 Planning for the middle class

5.1 Introduction

> We do have great urban planning, but we have very poor implementation strategies. We need help making urban plans and implementation more effective, such as being part of the urban planning processes.
> BY1301.

> Do we have urban planning? I don't think so. Look at our city. It is an unplanned city. I do not know what planners and the government have done, but it turns out that we do not have urban planning, in reality.
> BN1204.

If twenty-first century Thailand and its primary capital city of Bangkok is sliding towards 'post-democracy' as Glassman (2010) asserts, a shift that is driven by a self-serving middle class with little faith in conventional parliamentary politics, what then is the everyday politics of the middle class in this context, and what do they actually do to shape the city to their benefit? As Chapter 3 has shown, it is neither easy to discern the political behaviour of the middle class settling into any predictable pattern nor can one take for granted all the meanings possibly embedded in their efforts to capture the state, at least, at the bureaucratic level. Equally, as Glassman (2010) argues, while the broader political, economic and developmental generalities provide a context by which one can understand the Bangkok middle classes, it is important not to lose sight of the basic forces that animate the political decisions of those embroiled in quotidian politics to push forward their day-to-day life requirements. This chapter follows this argument and specifically considers how the middle classes engage in the city's planning process, especially to sustain their larger stake in Thai-style democracy, and also, how this translates in terms of the way they react to urban plans for modernisation and globalisation. Can we assume that the middle class approach to urban planning in Bangkok is embedded within their broad support for state interventionist policies favouring their own requirements that are neither in favour of nor against neoliberalism *per se*? Do they push for specific proposals that are less populist in nature involving massive state subsidies, but make them

feel good about their capacity for paying by themselves? In what way do their visions of an urban plan for Bangkok reflect and resonate with their continued support for a royalist-nationalist hegemony? More importantly, given their recent pro-coup support and the emergence of Bangkok as a site with the least progressive democratic sentiment, do their interactions and reactions even have a considerable influence on the city's planning trajectory?

These questions make for an interesting investigation since most middle classes at an everyday level are usually thought to be sceptical and critical of urban planning processes in cities in the global South, subscribing, as they often do, to representations of an unplanned city or a city in chaos (see Chapter 2). Such attitudes are not uncommon, and in fact even universal as a middle class reaction across the globe. Nevertheless, most middle class scholarship finds some form of middle class politics to considerably shape the city's policies, planning and development, as planners and policymakers are constantly accused of coming up with schemes promoting middle class lifestyle (Kanai 2010; Vasconcellos 1997; Siemiatycki 2006; Jenks 2003). In the case of Thailand, despite scholarly interest in the broader politics of the middle class, little has been studied in terms of how this translates at the ground level into the city's planning agenda. Is there a clear resonance in the way it scales down or does it reveal new insights into middle class politics, one that cannot be readily paraphrased, especially given the enormous material differences that have developed between the prospects of the different strands of the middle classes? Acknowledging the importance of the later part of this question, fieldwork was conducted between 2011 and 2013 in two urban neighbourhoods in BMR, Bangyai and Bangna to explore middle class responses to BMR's urban development agenda. As explained in Chapter 4, the two are not only socio-economically different (i.e. the former occupied by lower middle class residents and the latter housing the upper middle classes), but in the wake of the 2006 coup, they also reflect the polarisation of political loyalties within the middle classes with Bangyai residents continuing with their support for Thaksin Shinawatra and his party, while in Bangna most confirm their patronage of the perpetrators of the coup.

The next section begins with an examination of middle class perceptions of the planning processes in the city, the usefulness of preparing a plan and how (and if) they seek to participate in it. This is followed by their responses to flooding as a specific planning concern, where they were asked to consider the last major flooding (2011) as a planning challenge and the policy responses it triggered. The assumption here is that if the middle classes are as concerned with their prosperity and security as alleged, then the 2011 floods that affected almost all of the BMR, which has come to signify the increasing issue of floods as not only a consequence of unbridled urban development but also poor planning, should have compelled the middle classes to take on a more proactive role in ensuring that the directions of the city's plans addressed this vital concern. However, as this chapter shows, it is not so straightforward, and while the city planners did come up with several proposals including flood protection schemes, middle class reactions have been skewed by, not only the usual anxiety of NIMBYism, but also fragmented by the larger context of their political loyalties safeguarding the interests of a Thai-style democracy (or not).

5.2 'An urban plan for Bangkok, really?'

If we are to get a good understanding of why the middle classes remain convinced about the futility of the urban planning process, we need a better understanding of how they actually participate and respond to the preparation of an urban plan, particularly recognising the fact that there will be differences amongst members. Based on interviews with residents of Bangna and Bangyai, what became evident is that broadly speaking, members of the middle classes across the spectrum view urban planning as an essentially political process. While this remains the overarching reason, issues of access to different sources of information and comprehension of the urban plan (Samuel et al., 2003) itself proved to be important factors influencing their dismissal of any kind of urban plan for Bangkok as a feasible reality, with their political loyalties adding a further layer of complexity to the way middle classes react to the possibilities of an urban plan actually resolving Bangkok's development challenges.

5.2.1 Urban planning as a political instrument

For most members of the Bangkok middle classes, urban planning is seen as a process that is inseparable from politics. The reality is that it is very much a state-driven process whereby the central government decides how land can be developed, with local governments given the responsibility of implementing the plans. In this instance, any kind of power associated with urban planning is shared between an uneasy mix of what the central government and local governments think the plan should be and how it ought to be implemented. In his study of local politics in the Eastern Seaboard on the fringe of the EBMR, Shatkin (2004) found that local political bosses, with little understanding of planning or economic development, managed to consolidate land, foster consensus around a development agenda, and suppress any kind of opposition to such developments. In fact, it was the middle class-led civil society that allied with local political bosses to benefit from decentralisation and access to, not only greater local autonomy, but also control over resources. The latter are known for their lack of planning and development expertise, and making decisions purely on economic speculation of capital investment. Despite the growth of a powerful middle class, empowerment of civil society organisations is not guaranteed, all that the middle classes have been able to achieve (within and outside civil society) is disgruntled murmurings against such a development trajectory. Here, the planning process serves the interests of, not the middle classes, but the local political bosses in two ways: firstly, it is through the plan that key development areas are identified triggering a land accumulation process seen by some as corrupt, and secondly, the plan in no way safeguards its own recommendations, since planners allow it to be constantly violated with exemptions and otherwise. It is no surprise that the middle classes are sceptical about the planning process, as it is seen as a political instrument.

A common consensus amongst the middle classes is that political power has usurped, not only the urban planning process, but its implementation as well. This is not to deny the rigour that goes into the preparation of an urban plan. In the first instance, planners work on a plan according to existing government policy and the National Economic and Social Development Plan

(NESDP). However, an urban plan needs to be approved by the central government's urban plan board, comprised of politicians, whom carry a lot of weight. Due to this political approval process, the middle classes believe that politics essentially derails the integrity of the urban planning process. Each approved urban plan has a five-year duration that can be extended for two one-year periods, for a maximum of seven years. However, significant problems have occurred after the initial five years. During the two one-year renewals, implementation and control have not been very strict and deviation from the original plan is evident. Since 2002, there has not been any firm 5-year urban plan for Bangkok and the surrounding provinces (BMR). Delays in urban planning approvals have allowed politicians and their allies to develop properties disregarding the plans and taking advantage of insider information.

As for the implementation process, local governments and governors or mayors of municipalities approve building construction permits, and control the implementation of plans. However, local political bosses again seem to have little regard for the plan or the consequences of their actions. Albrechts (2003) asserts that none of the political actors involved in the implementation and control were fully aware of the impact of their decisions on the urban plan. The assertion of political power over and above the objective of the plan that normalises deviations underscores the belief that the BMR urban plan can never be successfully implemented. This is a frustrating fact acknowledged by planners, but one can little address or rectify.

In the case of Bangna residents who expressed clear distrust of contemporary Thai politics, there was little to rejoice in a planning process, especially one that was easily manipulated by corrupt politicians and cronyism.

> Politicians are always concerned with their own profits. If you look into the Urban Planning Act, you will see that various buildings in this area have broken the Act. Local governments allow them to do so. They just have to have connections or pay for connections. They provide proper construction plans and change them later. The government overlooks any change, as they have received money or, the building belongs to friends and family. This is why our urban planning has never been effective.

BN1109.

> Our urban plan has never been successfully implemented because of politicians. They never think of others. They have control, so sometimes they just use their power to get past planning regulations. I think maybe they also guide the planners who draw the planning.
> BN1112.

> Our urban planning has never been implemented properly. Our government has never tried to make an implementation of the plan work properly. Let's think about it like this…the one who designs the urban plan is not the one who implements it. The one who designs has only designed, but has no power to control. Control is in the hands of another department or some politician. You know politicians! It's ridiculous. It should not work like this.
> BN1105.

One of the common sentiments expressed is that urban plans have never been implemented properly in Thailand. As Marc Askew (2002) shows in his wonderful study of Bangkok, there is an element of fantasy to the city's urban planning, where development plans have been continuously produced (preferably by western consultants), but never implemented, only amended for the next version. Thus, planners were "kept busy monitoring and mapping the dynamic spaces of the metropolis on paper: their functions were restricted to 'painting the colours' (*rabai si*) of the land uses they could not control. The power to the city lay elsewhere" (*ibid*., 55). The Thai government set the first National Development Plan (NESDP) (1961-1966) as a development programme to engineer Bangkok's urban growth during the massive expansion of economic activities, consuming demand and enormous population growth in the twentieth century. The NESDP was highly effective reinforcing the dominance of the Bangkok economy, worsening regional inequality, and hastening a road-based city growth (*ibid*.). NESDP I is focussed on infrastructure development, particularly transportation systems, which led to linear urban development in Bangkok triggering growth alongside transportation development. Under economic growth and NESDP, Bangkok city area expanded dramatically until planners eventually extended Bangkok's definition as a mega-urban region: BMR and EBMR (see Chapter 2). Such development programmes tried to position the city as the strategic hub for Thailand in the Southeast Asian

regional economy, racing for global trade and services with rivals such as Singapore (Phisit 1988). However, NESDP's emphasis on economic growth meant that urban planning elements were set aside with little efforts to resonate the two together.

Despite several attempts at producing an urban plan for Bangkok, there is no Planning Act regulation that requires landowners to seek planning permission before development, even though there are building construction regulations that require approval. The planning system in Bangkok is thus indirectly processed through the Building Control Act (Berry and McGreal 1999). As corrupt local politicians can override development approvals envisioned in the plan, they have usurped control over its implementation from the planners. Politicians in league with local officials can approve inappropriate development as there is no other government authority to double-check their approval. There is only the possibility of disgruntled residents taking action against them in court. Which leads us to question why there is ever a need for a plan at all, especially when proven untrustworthy, influenced as it has been by politics. This is largely the reasoning Bangna residents provided as they emphasised the futility of participating in any kind of urban planning process. Interestingly, Bangyai residents seem to still have more faith in urban planning and implementation despite the interference of politicians who aim to subvert plans.

> The politicians should listen to planners, as they are experts on planning. They analyse and propose what is appropriate for cities. They know best as regards planning. However, politicians only use planning for their own profits and ignore the urban plan or make the urban plan fit to their advantage. I believe they can do it and planners can do nothing but follow them. Power is not in the hands of planners.
> BN1312.

> Our planners make urban planning for us. I believe they can do it well if politicians do not put their hand into the planning processes. Politicians only interfere with planning for their own profit. Did you hear the news about the gated community near the new airport? It shouldn't be there. It was stated in the planning, but the plan announced it after the gated community already started construction. I bet it must be somehow related to politicians. The planning was about to be announced. They must know why they approved the construction.
> BN1209.

In the interviews, Bangna residents mostly held an ideal of impartial bureaucracy (Fainstein 2002) that emphasises the expertise and planner capability. They resented the autocratic decision making that overrode the objectivity of the bureaucratic process. The failure of the urban plan for them is a reflection of the failure of planning as a bureaucratic exercise, becoming instead a political instrument that they do not trust. On the other hand, Bangyai residents still believe in the urban plan, even if it is appropriated by politicians, not because they believe that a bureaucratic process will prevail but because of their broader subscription to a client-patron relationship with politicians, part of which involves negotiating gains through the plan.

Reliability of politics, reliability of the plan

While most Bangna residents confessed to having withdrawn from the planning process, paying little attention to possibilities of participation or having their concerns heard, Bangyai residents, in contrast, admitted to a continued engagement with the planning efforts in the city, albeit one that is effected, not through communications with planners, but with politicians. Much of this has to do with complaints of basic urban infrastructure, water supply, electrical power, landline telephones, pedestrian walkways and concrete roads, which are all missing in Bangyai:

> As you can see, the street connecting our community to the main road lacks a pedestrian walkway. We need the government to help us improve that. It is for our safety when walking along the street. If the local government does not supply this infrastructure, who will? I am trying to attend every meeting with the community to urge them to do it and to tell them what our needs are.
> BY1301.

> Some houses in our area still do not have access to a water supply. Our local municipality, and local governor, help them by investing in pipe to connect water supplies for them. We, the residents, have no power to deal with these problems by ourselves. We need support from the local authorities.
> BY1314.

Bangyai residents realise that through a process of decentralisation, powers related to urban development have been handed over to local governors who wield greater control over key planning decisions (Shatkin 2004). This forces them to keep a close eye on key planning decisions and how this might affect their area. They often resort to relying on the creation of some form of social movement (civil society or street protest) to be part of the decision-making process (Kanai 2010).

> If we let planners and political powers alone drive development, how can they fulfil our needs? They do not live in the area. We need to be part of the urban plan, so we can raise our voices to say what needs to be developed in this neighbourhood.
> BY1218.

> It is the local government and urban planners who are responsible for our infrastructure development. The power and money for development are in their hands. We rely on them to help us improve our quality of life. So, we need to be part of the development plan they make. We can express what we think they should do for us.
> BY1209.

For Bangyai residents, wielding political power in planning is not necessarily a bad thing if it can be used to stimulate infrastructure development in the area. They do not mind so much political intervention and are not as idealistic about planning as an apolitical process as Bangna residents are. This compels us to rethink some of the current debates within planning theories especially ones

that are critically reflecting on the influence of planning within the broader urban restructuring processes affecting cities around the globe.

5.2.2 Still a top-down process

In a critique of comprehensive urban planning published in 1971, John Friedmann raised concerns over its totalitarian nature relying on central authority and control, adhering to a single standard of public interest. He cynically observed those who supported such a system believing that they would be in control. There is an element of truth in this remark for the present study as this is perhaps what the residents of Bangna believed when they endorsed planning as a top-down bureaucratic process. However, what they found in reality is that by the time the plan arrives at a point to allow their participation, the draft of the plan is already in place based on an opaque set of decisions made by planners behind closed doors. At this stage, they feel that they will not be able to make any differences to the urban plan and do not want to waste their time with a process that would be for namesake only.

> I believe that the urban planning process by the planner is the best way to contribute to a plan. I have no experience in this kind of thing, so I prefer to let planners do it. Moreover, I do not think we can make any changes to the plans that have already been done. The planner would not want to change it according to our opinions, which may not agree with the plan they created.
> BN1218.

> I believe that we cannot request any changes to the draft urban plan, the revision of which planning authorities invite local residents to be part of. The authorities let us be part of the process because they have to as per the law. They do not intend to listen to us. If we propose something that has not been put into the plan, they will have their own rational reasons not to follow our comments.
> BN1311.

Bangna residents are well aware that when public hearings are held, it is only a ticking box exercise, appeasing such requirements on paper. What they resent here is the eventual sense of being useless or unwanted as anything they say is recorded at these sessions but not taken into account. Instead, they prefer

retaining the integrity of the urban plan through a bureaucratic process given that its mostly the upper classes who comprise the bureaucracy and here they would ensure that their interests are not compromised. What they have found over the years is that the actual operation of planning bureaucracies is not conducive to a democratic model of planning, and the former is best left alone with little meddling in the guise of public participation. As Vasconcellos (1997) found in the case of Sao Paolo, the middle class (especially the upper stratum) share common interests with bureaucrats and technocrats, with planners invariably incorporating their interests into the plan.

Furthermore, social and cultural beliefs of Thai people towards bureaucratic governing processes is another factor indicating that the upper middle class does not feel the need to interfere with the bureaucrats but rather to simply let them do their work efficiently. This is not only related to the upper middle class' continued support towards sustaining Thai-style democracy where the elites still dominate the power systems, but also because they believe they might jeopardise their self-interest by interfering with a process that might be well beyond their own exertions of power. Such a conviction is found in a popular Thai saying: *This is a matter for the top man, the bureaucrats, so let them handle it. It is not our thing*. In a paradoxical way, residents of Bangna, typifying the upper middle classes, end up endorsing the state as a solo planning agent (*cf.* Souza 2006). They prefer to remain detached from the planning process, unwilling to learn about the proposals or understand them. Urban planning is seen as a technical matter that has to be undertaken on the basis of rationality; something that ordinary people cannot understand (*ibid.*). Claiming that they are ordinary people with little comprehensive about what is an effective and complex process, they believe that they should leave it to those with the requisite amount of skills to address them, i.e., the urban planners.

> Can you please explain to me how the urban planning process works? I am not familiar with how urban planning works. It seems to me that urban planning is not my issue.
> BN1210.

> I know that we have urban planning. I do not know how urban planning can be planned. What factors should I consider to formulate an urban plan? To be honest, I have no clear understanding of the urban planning process and I do not want to find an answer. I am busy enough with my work. We have experts to take care of this job. Let them do it.
> BN1314.

Also driving such a viewpoint is the hopelessness of getting involved, as Bangna residents emphasised; it is hard to see any obvious positive output from pursuing the urban plan. Bangkok, in their eyes, still remains an unplanned city. In most of the interviews, participants clarified that if the purpose of planning is to organise the city's land use at a basic level, there is no evidence of even this level of planning. What convinces them to leave the process as it is, is the fact that the area is at least well served in terms of basic infrastructure.

> What is planning? If planning is about land-use zoning, I will say we have no planning. How does the planning process work? I am still curious, as we still see unorganised land-use all over Bangkok. If planning is to organise basic infrastructure for the city, I will say it works perfectly fine in my area. We have perfect access to basic infrastructure.
> BN1215.

In contrast, Bangyai residents do not repose such a faith in leaving a bureaucratic planning system alone, precisely for this reason. They do not believe in this process when they feel ill-served by it, still struggling to access a basic infrastructure catering their needs. They relish its democratisation through possibilities of participation as they seek to gain the 'ears' of key decision-makers, be they planners or politicians. Moreover, Bangyai as a neighbourhood suffers from anxieties of instability as there are rumours of proposed land use classification to usher in new urban development into the area. Residents, as a result, are on high alert, as they are constantly following the news to understand what is going to happen and how they can either resist or benefit. What they attempt in this context is to approach planning as a social movement, pumping planners with alternatives of what, in their interests, would be a 'suitable plan' for Bangyai.

Another reason for this perception of urban planning as a top-down process is the fact that announcements about new preparations for an urban plan are often limited and do not reach all members of the society or provide the requisite amount of information. This is a criticism particularly echoed in Bangna who maintain that they generally do not receive any knowledge, news or announcements about how planning will be completed. More importantly, according to them, public participation hardly provides them with information, limited as it is, to what is available in newspapers and public notices. Although authorities provide planning information online, Bangna residents (who can easily access this) maintain that they were not aware of its availability, their explanation being:

> I never knew that the urban planning authorities had an online information centre. In this era, they should have, shouldn't they? Anyway, I have never experienced their online channel and I do not think I will put much effort into looking for their webpage.
> BN1211.

> People at my age, above 45, wouldn't pay much attention to online information or web pages. We prefer to follow news from newspapers and television. I think they have a webpage about planning but I have never explored it and I never will.
> BN1206.

Most of the middle class residents in Bangna confessed that they usually follow news and announcements through traditional mass media that covers very few issues about urban planning. Due to the limited channels for urban planning announcements and the lack of interest, only limited numbers of residents receive this information. Most announcements are published in places not relevant to upper middle class life. Furthermore, most of the upper middle class live in gated communities that do not allow non-residents inside. In fact, local government authorities complained that it is very difficult to ensure that the upper middle class in gated communities receive any news or announcements from the State because they cannot get inside their fortified compound to provide information. Planners thus argue that they cannot be held responsible for what they see as a wilful act on the part of the upper middle class to withhold themselves from the planning process. Thus, BMR's planners affirm

that the upper middle class is deliberately ignorant of the urban planning process. While they reason that urban planning is essentially new to Thais, with many unwilling to learn about it, they also understand that disinterest is typical of the upper middle class as they have what they need and do not believe that any additional involvement with planning would further their interests. According to them, those that want to be involved are those who are still in need of urban planning (such as Bangyai) or, those who can reap tangible benefits such as real estate developers, who have land to sell and thus use planning as a way of forecasting the market, and lastly, speculative businessmen.

Interviews with the lower middle class residents reveal a completely opposing view to that of the upper middle class as they clarified that have had no problems in accessing news or information about public participation in the urban planning process or reacting to particular planning issues. They not only maintain that they are well-informed but confirm their desire to be part of the decision-making process. This polarisation in middle class opinions about the prospects of an urban plan for Bangkok became even more obvious when considered with respect to a specific issue: planning responses to the 2011 floods, where at one level it was seen as a basic infrastructure problem, and at another, it invoked planning concerns around issues that were more than simply elementary.

5.3 Flooding as a planning crisis

Flooding is not a new challenge, either in Thailand or the BMR. Since its foundations in the eighteenth century, Bangkok has suffered innumerable floods. There have been around fifteen notable flooding crises in the history of this 228-year-old city. However, until the late twentieth century, there were instances of severe flooding only once every two to three decades. The worst recorded was in 1942 when the floods lasted for nearly two months, and Bangkok became a freshwater sea. Automotive transport was grounded and boats had to be brought out to rescue people, recalling the memory of Bangkok as a Venice of the East (Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1: Bangkok Flood in 1942

Source: Manager Online (2005)

From 1975-1999 onwards, Bangkok faced 'severe floods' every 3-5 years. One such flood was in 1983 when it lasted for four months. This was the longest duration of flooding in Bangkok's history at that time with the city incurring losses of 6.598 billion Baht (approximately £131.96 million).[13] In 1996, Bangkok and its vicinity were flooded once again. Floods remained in the city for nearly two months and the water level was as high as seen in 1942, which was considered one of the worst flooding crises in Bangkok. After the 1996 floods, it seemed that Bangkok was spared from severe floods for fifteen years until the devastating floods of 2011.

Bangkokians in general tend to blame poor urban planning and its resulting urban development as one of the major factors contributing to severe floods. Middle class responses tend to broadly echo this sentiment, and yet embedded within these conversations are a greater revelation of the differentiated nature of middle class politics, at one level a clear binary between

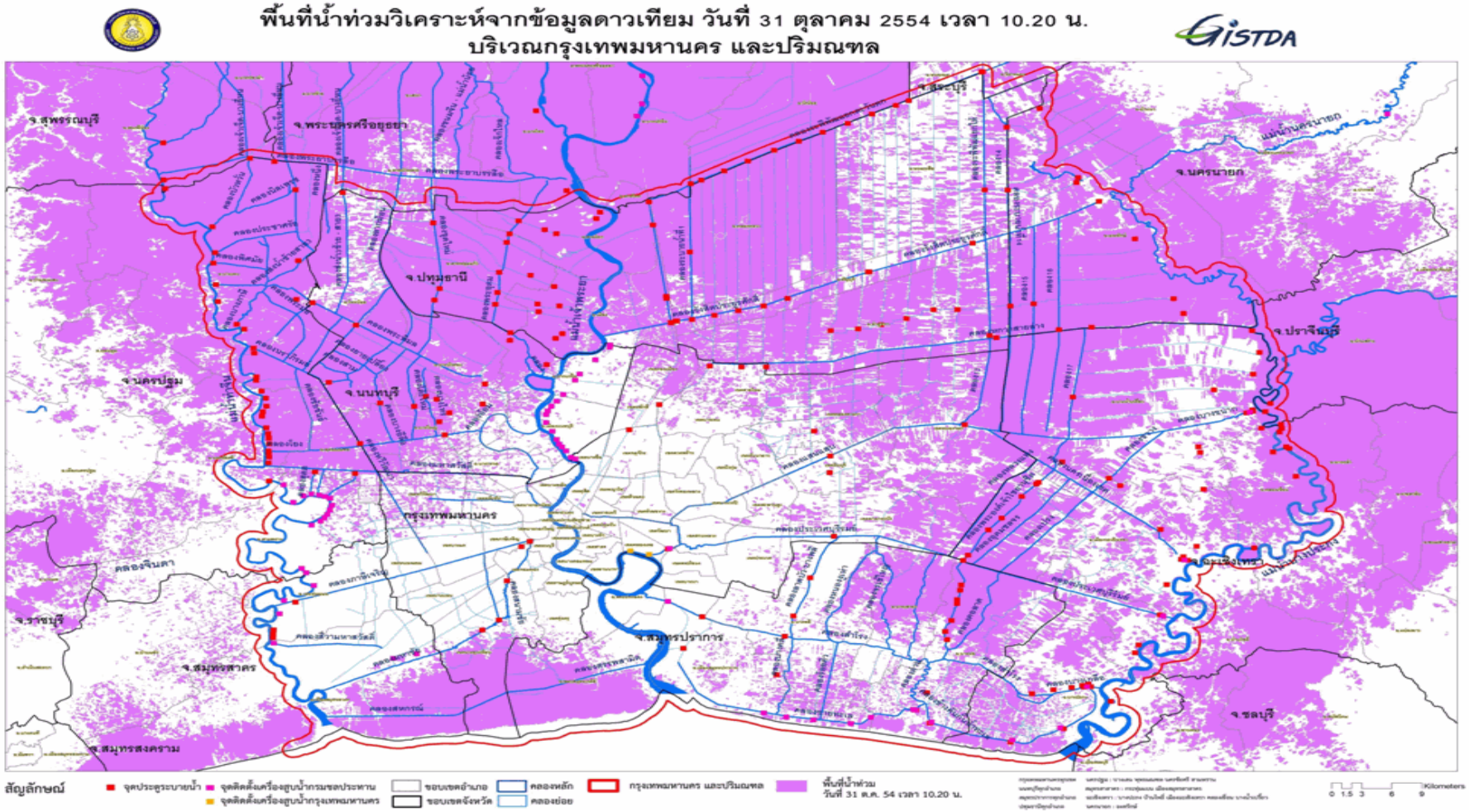
[13] Rate 50 Baht per £1.

the upper and lower middle classes and at another, this illustrates the foreboding influence of Thai-style democracy and its politics.

5.3.1 The 2011 floods

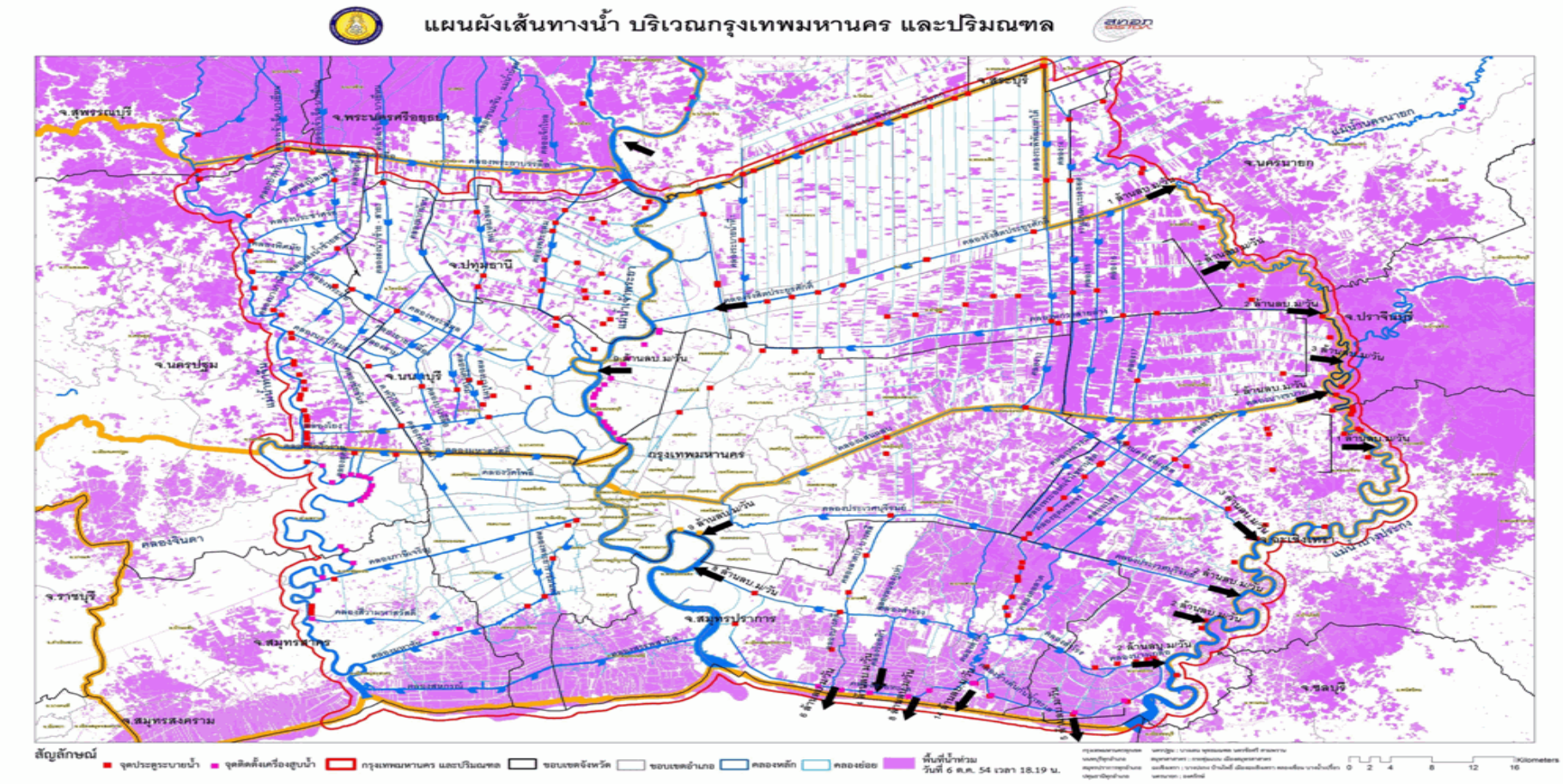
A few months after Thailand's national election in 2011, the country experienced one of the worst and most chaotic of floods in its history. Flooding lasted half a year, from July 2011 to mid-January 2012, covering almost the whole country, six million hectors and 65 provinces, including Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR). Coming from the upcountry, floods reached the BMR boundary in September 2011, quickly covering outer parts of the BMR by October 2011, and reached some parts of the inner city by November 2011. Figures 5-2, 5-3 and 5-4 show the extent of the flooding from October to November 2011. The red line indicates the BMR boundary and the blue line represents rivers and major canals, and the light blue represents the minor canal network. Red dots show locks in the canals and lavender dots show pump stations. Lavender areas represent flooded areas, while those in white indicate dry zones.

Figure 5-2: Flood Area Map on October 6, 2011



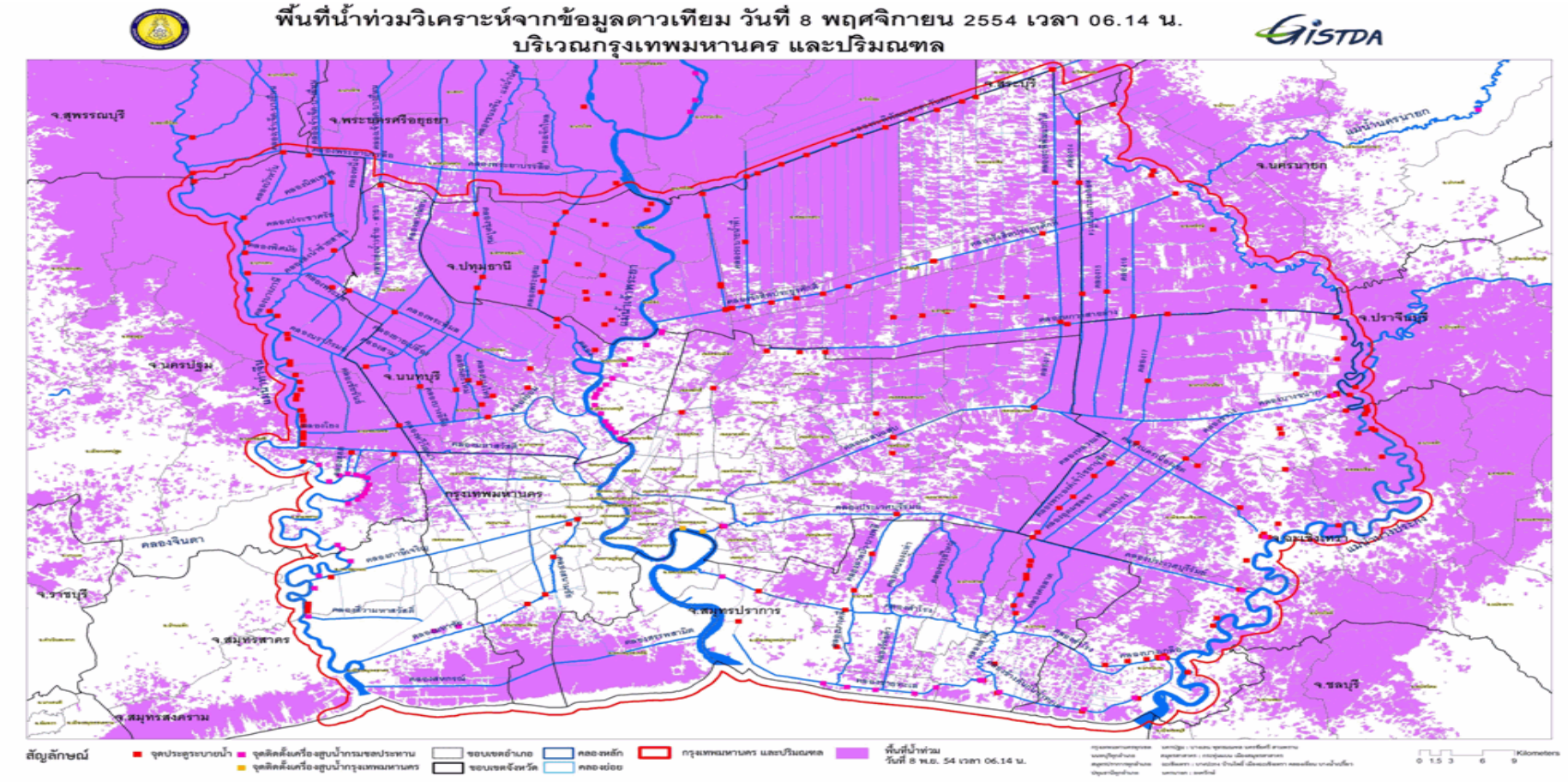
Source: Thailand Integration Water Resource Management (n.d.)

Figure 5-3: Flood Area Map on October 31, 2011



Source: Thailand Integration Water Resource Management (n.d.)

Figure 5-4: Flood Area Map on November 8, 2011



Source: Thailand Integration Water Resource Management (n.d.)

Figure 5-4 shows few dry areas in the BMR by the beginning of November, which triggered Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to finally pursue action to save inner Bangkok, the central business district, historic centre and Suvarnabhumi Airport. The Prime Minister decided that keeping the inner city dry at the expense of letting outer areas remain flooded was preferable, concerned that foreigners would will lose confidence in the country as they wonder why Thais could not save their own capital (Fuller, 2011). In this regard, uneven reporting was found in terms of the impact of the flooding crisis, which highlighted inequality and unjust spatiality of exposure to the floods (Marks 2015). The decision taken by the Prime Minister (representation of politics) was to ignore the environmental condition of Bangkok causing severe flooding in some areas while completely dry in others parts of BMR and its nearby provinces.

Under these circumstances, the BMR and nearby provinces with industrial estates, constituting the heart of the Thai economy, became the focus of international, national and local concern, as it became apparent that the flooding crisis was dramatically affecting the macro economy of Thailand as newspapers reported that the 2011 flooding crisis resulted in losses of 250 billion Baht to the Thai economy (Bangkok Business News 2011). While it became clear at a national level that Bangkok had to be saved at all costs, there was reported disagreement between the national government and Bangkok's local government over how this would be done. The media's first reaction in this instance was to portray the floods as a political crisis as seen in the Bangkok Post (2011):

Figure 5-5: Flooding Crisis news from Bangkok Post

Flood situation worsens as crisis becomes political

By Terry Fredrickson

Flood waters continued to flow deeper into Bangkok because Bangkok governor and national governments just cannot seem to fully cooperate. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) requested cooperation from the government or said it would abandon the existing plan and tackle the city's flooding problem by itself. The BMA claimed that Flood Relief Operations Command (FROC) did not share its plans, so how can it cooperate in tackling the floods? The BMA asked the FROC to provide water pumps and speed up flood drainage operations a week ago, but it had not received any response. The Irrigation Department accused the BMA of asking the wrong agency for the loan of pumps. The BMA also asked the Royal Irrigation Department to open its 20 sluice gates. The request was also refused.

The central government was confident with its new strategy to protect Bangkok from floods, the big bag barrier. Six kilometres of the big bag barrier were constructed in the northern part of Bangkok. The government believed that that flooding in the northern part of the city would ease. The big bag barrier, made of thousands of enormous sand bags, weighs 2.5 tonnes. The barrier aimed to prevent flooding from the North from moving into central Bangkok.

Bangkok Post Newspaper on November 6, 2011.

Despite ample warning, as flood waters encroached upon Bangkok, there was no clear plan to deal with it. A series of contradictory governmental statements during the crisis period only made matters worse (Mydans 2011). Most of these focussed on making predictions on which areas within Bangkok would actually flood and which would remain dry. With a crude form of forecasting, these statements were contradictory, leaving residents feeling concerned and without direction. While the government was forced into damage-control mode, it was obvious that the damage was already done.

Thus, when the government claimed that the 2011 flooding crisis was

caused by an unusual amount of rainfall, increasing by 143 per cent (Daisuke et al., 2012), during the monsoon season, such an explanation was seen as inaccurate. While it cannot be denied that the unexpected amount of rainfall led to water being released from three big dams in the northern part of Thailand, flooding eventually the central plain and Bangkok, both the media and the general public believed that better government action could have prevented this crisis, or at least lessened its impact, viewing it clearly as a political failure. One of the local newspapers, Daily News (2011), reported on the flooding crisis seminar in December 2011 (Figure 5-6):

Figure 5-6: Flooding crisis report from Daily News, 15 December 2011 (original text in Thai, translated into English by author)

Academics Accuse the Government as the cause of 2011 Flooding Crisis.

Academics opened the stage by discussing about the real problems causing the 2011 flood. On the of 15th December, 2011 at Imperial Queen's Park Hotel, over three hundred academics and civilians affected by floods, attended the 2011 flooding crisis seminar under the title "Natural Disaster or Incapability of the Government: what are the real causes of the 2011 floods?" Mr. Suwathin, President of National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) Senate said that the 2011 flooding crisis was caused by the failure of political systems and the failure of Thai governing system. The Thai government system allowed each government agency to work without cooperation. The government did not pay attention to draining water but did pay attention to protecting industrial estates. He said we cannot hope for help from the government; that we need to manage our own strategies to deal with this crisis. The government has not done its duty. They should have the capability to manage flood water to drain away, helping civilians to deal with their problems by them providing food and, financial support for those who lost their properties due to the floods. Moreover, the government should have looked at urban planning and canals in the cities to see what needed to be improved and developed to prevent future floods and drain out the water we have now.

Mr. Suchat Nawakawong, an academic from the Environmental and Natural Resources faculty Mahidol University, also asserted that one of the most important problems of the crisis is that civilians did not know that floods would reach their doorsteps. The government had not told the truth to civilians as to how much water they would face and which areas were at risk from flooding. As a result of these circumstances, they had no protection or any preparation to deal with floods, causing severe damage.

Academics Accuse the Government as the cause of 2011 Flooding Crisis.

…Continued

The discussion also argued about future effects of floods. The flooding crisis might affect investors' trust in Thailand. We should start finding strategies to get back trust from those investors. There was also the question of whether flooding will happen again next year. The government should find a solution to prevent flooding crises and civilians should be able to be part of the decision-making.

They insisted that the government had not provided appropriate flooding information to civilians. The Flood Relief Operation Centre, on behalf of the Thai government, had not given clear information about the floods and had no clear information about evacuation or any flooding solution strategies. The government does not have a supplemental plan to take care of evacuation and renovation after the water drains out. This causes chaos. They concluded that Thais learned two main lessons from the 2011 flooding crisis. Damage from natural disasters can be prevented by rethinking home construction style and revising urban planning to prepare for floods and; that Thais need to learn how to deal with problems together, helping each other find flooding protection solutions for neighborhoods, because this flooding crisis was not only caused by nature. but by the failure of the Thai government management.

The morale here is that while the government needs to learn how to create a better solution, Thais cannot rely on the government as they need to learn how to help themselves during such instances of flooding.

The World Bank (2011) estimates that during the floods up to 1st December 2011, Thailand lost 1,425 billion Baht (approximately £28.5 billion) in terms of economic damage. The biggest loss was in the manufacturing sector with a total loss of 1,007 billion Baht (approximately £20.14 billion). Fifteen industrial sectors, seven industrial estates, and 804 companies suffered from the floods (Thai Flood n.d.). Dire predictions were made about Thailand's

economic growth rate in 2011 dropping from 2.6 per cent to 1.0 per cent (Bank of Thailand n.d.). Besides economic losses, the floods resulted in 813 deaths with 3 people missing nationwide as of 8th January 2012 (Ministry of Interior 2012). Besides these fear-mongering figures, flood-related destruction in the BMR affected, not only the economy, but also disrupted ordinary people's lives. Innumerable properties were under water for months, with many needing to be evacuated. In severely flooded areas, water levels were in excess of one metre above normal levels (Figure 5-7 and Figure 5-8).

Figure 5-7: Severe flood areas picture around BMR where water level is one-metre-high or above

Source: Bangkok Business News (n.d.)

Figure 5-8: Flooding Crisis Disruption on BMR roads

Source Kapook (n.d.), and TLC (n.d.)

More than fifty per cent of the BMR was flooded, causing severe disruption. In addition to houses being inundated, businesses were disrupted, even if the companies were not located in a flooded area. As transportation came to a standstill, logistic systems for the transport of goods were badly affected. Roads connecting the BMR to northern parts of Thailand were cut off for a few weeks. There were shortages of goods, including food and drinking water, within the BMR itself.

This should not come as a surprise given that the possibility of flooding is an ever-present feature of Bangkok because of the city's geographic location and its physical character. As a city of canals dominated by a natural waterscape system, flooding is a perennial problem that Bangkok cannot reverse. Some older residents recalled that Bangkokians could cope with heavy floods and live with them until the last three decades when modernisation changed the city's features:

> When I was young, Bangkok and its vicinity always flooded during a certain time of the year. Although some years the flood was very high, such as in 1942, we did not have much trouble. We would notice that water came to the city when the river began to rise. When we saw that, we would move our stuff to the second floor or high places. We could usually prepare for the flood. Almost every house had a small boat. Once Bangkok flooded, we could use our boats to travel around. Nowadays, the city has changed. Most houses do not have a boat. Once the city floods, they cannot do anything.
> (ASTV Manager Online, 2005)

This perception of Bangkok as a city of water (in a tragic sense) is ironic given its once-reputation as the 'Venice of the East'. For the most part, residents and businesses in the city seem to cope with the floods as an annual occurrence. In fact, in the 1980s and 1990s when the Thai economy and the BMR expanded dramatically, unprecedented floods in 1983 and 1995 did not seem to affect the city or its economic prospects. This is perhaps one of the reasons why there has been no substantial urban planning efforts to address floods as a significant planning issue. In fact, the usual clichés of uncontrolled urbanisation persisted as canals and swamps were filled, rainwater spill-ways were built over and the natural drainage pattern of rainwater was blocked through urban development. But the floods of 2011 took on a different hue as reactions were not blasé but indicated extreme dissatisfaction with the government, making one wonder if this had anything to do with the post-2006 coup political climate.

5.3.2 Flooding as a political failure

For most middle class residents (irrespective of whether they were affected or not), a common problem was that if the government had better planned the city, or had a better strategy in place to address flooding problems, then the 2011 floods would not have been so bad.

> I believe that the government could have created a better solution during the flooding crisis. They kept hiding the truth from us and we had stupidly believed that those big bag blockers could protect the city from floods without any backup plan. If they had told us the truth and we all had had proper preparation for the floods, we would not have lost this much. BY1203.

> Although my house didn't flood, I followed the news every day. What I saw was that the government had made the situation worse. Why couldn't they plan an estimation of flood-risk areas? Why didn't they propose a master plan for all government agencies? The government blocked water with the big blocker bags, but the BMA closed the locks, blocking the way to drain water to river mouths. If they had just let water flow out, things would have been better.
> BN1214.

In this context, middle class residents viewed flooding equally as an infrastructure problem as well as a political failure; floods are foreseen in this monsoon country. Given that the BMR is on the lower part of Thailand's central plain, a floodplain with a natural floodway, it is common to have floods during the monsoon season. However, the 2011 floods could not be considered normal with two to three metres of standing water in the capital city for three months. For the middle classes in Bangkok, the 2011 floods could not be viewed simply as a natural disaster. Since the late 1980s, millions of baht have been invested in flood management infrastructure including pump stations, canal locks, underground drainage systems and dams. The King even suggested that the Thai government create projects for water management in order to solve agriculture water problems to relieve flooding in the Thailand central plain and the BMR. These suggested projects were proudly earmarked as Royal Projects. Along with the Royal Projects, two big river dams, Bhumibol Dam and Sirikit Dam, were built in the upper central plain to collect water in the central plain and control water flowing from the north to the lower central plain and the BMR. Keeping with the King's proposal, these dams were also intended to benefit agriculture. Water pump stations (Figure 5-9) and water gates (Figure 5-10) were constructed along canals and rivers in BMR areas. These were built to drain water out of the city to the sea as quickly as possible and minimise the risk of flooding.

Figure 5-9: Water pump station

Source: Researcher (10th August, 2013)

Figure 5-10: Water gate stations

Source: Adddoi (2011)

Figure 5-11: Water Expressway or Water Bridge in Samut-Prakarn, one of the BMR Provinces

Source: BlueHill (2011)

The Water Expressway (Figure 5-11), one of the Royal Projects, was built in the BMR to transport water from the eastern area of the city out to sea. This project and other water management projects seemed to efficiently reduce severe flooding in the BMR, as the BMR had no severe flooding for 15 years between 1996 and 2011. Thus, when the 2011 floods breached these defences, a general consensus was it was the government's fault for not managing the available infrastructure to its best advantage.

For the middle classes there was, in fact, no doubt that the current political crisis in Thailand, having caused considerable disruption to the planning process, was a major reason for the 2011 floods. The fracturing of government administration creates serious problems to the governance system; in this case, the Thai government failed in risk management causing the 2011 flood (Marks and Lebel 2016). It was clear that poor water management, particularly with regard to dams in Thailand's central plain, indicated political inaction that contributed to severe floods. Reporting and managing rainfall and water collection in the dams are the responsibility of the Royal Irrigation Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. However, post-flood analyses revealed that engineers managing the dams retained too much water, too early in the year, as a result of which meant that the dams reached their full capacity too quickly. Because water was not let out gradually in a timely manner, an unforeseen amount of water had to be released to keep the dams from bursting, a huge quantity that could have filled 450,000 Olympic swimming pools (Fuller 2011). As a result, the BMR was inundated for months. Most middle classes felt that the ongoing political crisis did not allow the government to have a comprehensive overview of the situation. As an enormous quantity of water slowly flowed into the BMR, the Thai national government tried to protect the capital, especially Bangkok's city centre. Unfortunately, the decision was considered to be political rather than based on scientific reasoning. Some politicians with power bases outside the city centre disagreed that the inner city should be spared. This political conflict and the resulting disorganisation it caused in the real time management of the flood were reported daily. Bangkok's city centre was dry, but many parts on the city's

periphery were severely flooded for months. During fieldwork conducted for this research, residents from both Bangna and Bangyai were asked to comment on the 2011 floods, especially their opinion about state action and reactions. Surprisingly both the neighbourhoods held the government accountable as its decision to save Bangkok backfired with several neighbourhoods such as Bangyai becoming inundated:

> I do understand that Bangkok city centre needs to be safe. However, that does not mean that we could not let water pass through some parts of Bangkok to the sea. The government saved Bangkok by blocking waterways. How was water drained out of the BMR to the sea? We were under water. It is not right.
> BY1215.

> My home district was not flooded but I am willing to let water pass to the sea and reduce stress from other parts of the BMR. If the government had let the water flow, water levels would not have been this high. Water would not have remained inland this long, and properties would not have been this damaged.
> BN1205.

At one level, it would seem that the response of Bangna residents is hypothetical as they did not get flooded. Is their reaction an abstraction and would they have assumed a different position if they had been affected by the floods? While this is one possibility, another is the fact that floods, at a larger scale, had an economic impact that affected Bangna and Bangyai residents equally. In a sense, what the Bangna resident said is speculative as they wondered if the loss of a home would be less, compared to the economic losses incurred (and which probably affected them more).

In blaming the state for the floods, the middle classes made specific accusations, one of them being the fragmentation of tasks shared by the governmental authorities and utter lack of competence as far as the elected government was concerned. The former is an inevitability of the Thai government's working mechanisms. At least three separate government agencies were charged with managing the consequences of the 2011 floods, but did so with little organised cooperation. Planners when asked about this confessed that since the nature of government agencies is to work

independently, they are seldom able to bring them all together, especially during moments of crisis such as the 2011 floods. Although some individuals within these agencies tried to cooperate with others, they were rarely successful.

> We all know that Thai government agencies' working processes are our weak point. Lack of cooperation created the problem. We have tried to maintain some cooperation. However, it has not gone well. In a special circumstance like flooding, this character of government agencies is at its worst. We argued and the effect of argument was trouble for residents. The Bangkok Administration blocked water gates in Bangkok's canals. We wanted them to open the water gates. We wanted to relieve water from our district. If we only had one agency to take care of the problem or we had a central master plan, there would be no overlap in working or disagreement on management.
> Scholar 05, 6 July 2012.

Here, middle class criticism is not only of an event that had already taken place, but also in terms of the government's ability to address flooding problems in the future.

> As we can see, a lack of unity in government working processes caused us tremendous losses. The 2011 flooding crisis was a tough lesson for all of us. If the government still works like this, there will not be any improvement. When water comes again in this coming rainy season, we will again be under water.
> BY1207.

> As you see how the government fails to manage and solve problems for us, we need to rely on ourselves. If the government cannot improve their working processes and work with unity (I think they never will), the problem will not be solved.
> BN1214.

The fragmented nature of governmental operations was frequently cited by the middle classes, planners and academics as a cause of the 2011 floods, most obviously seen in disagreements between the central government and local Bangkok government, and amongst local governments across affected provinces. Once the flood reached the BMR, differences in opinion as to how the flood ought to be managed flared between the central government (Pheu Thai

Party) and the local government led by Bangkok governor M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra (Democrat Party), with one mostly trying to impede the other, and worse, each using the flood to discredit the other. Although Bangkok's governor had full authority within Bangkok, he still needed some support from the national government. For example, he claimed that Bangkok did not have enough pumps to facilitate water drainage, and when his local government requested pumps from the Royal Irrigation Department, he alleged that there was no response from the department for a week. The department, on the other hand, maintained that the Bangkok government had not followed the rules for such a requisition, even though it was an emergency. The local government retaliated by refusing to cooperate with the central government. For instance, the Bangkok governor refused to open water gates within Bangkok territory despite the national government's request. These political squabbles caused confusion and distrust among residents, further exasperated by the conflicting public statements issued by representatives of the national and local government. Meetings and agreements between the two sides were few, and often unproductive. Even advice or announcements to evacuate various Bangkok districts differed. While the national government said certain districts would be safe, local governments prudently told residents to be prepared to evacuate at any time causing stress and panic. Furthermore, amongst the local governments within the BMR, there was little or no cooperation. Residents at this point lost faith in both the national and local governments. Since the 2006 coup, there has been a sharp political polarisation in Thai society, with the 2011 floods bringing these divisions to the fore. Politicians, civil servants and academics lined up, with each political side presenting its own set of experts on food management. However, as these so-called experts were appointed only on a political basis, the national government ended up not hiring the right people for the job. If they had, the crisis in the BMR may have not been so severe.

'Useless' planning

There was thus a chain reaction of sorts triggered by the continued influence of the ongoing national political conflicts, one that disrupted all efforts at state-led

planning and implementation of flood management schemes. More importantly, it led to management errors that could have been easily avoided. As the flooding in 2011 became a prime example of how such conflicts can lead to disastrous results, the Thai middle classes were conscious of this cause and effect relationship. They believed that Thai politics was once again interfering with the urban planning process, as result of which, each plan was outliving its usefulness, as discussed earlier. Regulations emerging from the urban planning process have demonstrated their inability to keep up with actual urban growth and cannot control or shape urban development, some of them having clearly taken place on the floodplain. For instance, in the Bangyai area, some real estate developers constructed housing estates on floodplains. The following example was given by a planner:

> We, planners, understand that most of the BMR areas are in a basin. Our city is located on the river mouth basin, which easily floods during the rainy season. We need to preserve some floodplain in the city to allow water drainage from the north of Thailand to the sea. The problem is that private real estate developers buy land that used to be for agricultural use and build up properties to respond to demand from the real estate market. This development reduces the amount of surface land to absorb water because the soil is now a concrete surface. It also blocks water from draining to the sea. The planners are trying to preserve those areas to reduce flood crises in BMR. However, our slow urban planning processes makes us one step behind the developers. We are unable to preserve those lands, but we are trying to do the best we can.
> Scholar 07, 17 July 2013.

It is obvious that ineffective control of farmland redevelopment in the BMR basin created a situation in which monsoon rains could no longer be absorbed into the soil or be allowed to flow to waterways and out to sea. Properties have been built recklessly along canal borders, riverbanks, swamps, and catchment areas that should have been preserved for flood prevention. In addition to these major developments impeding absorption and water flow, private property owners sometimes fill in small canals on their land that used to drain water to rivers and canals, further exacerbating the problem.

5.3.3 Flood protection schemes: better late than never?

Typical of such disasters, in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 flooding crisis, an anxious state eager to soothe citizen anxieties announced flurry flood protection schemes, assuring that they would improve water management, not only within BMR, but rest of the country and alleviate the risk of floods in the future. These schemes could be classified broadly into two categories: national level flood protection schemes and those aimed mainly at the BMR. The former are very large projects under central government control, divided into 9 modules with 10 projects. Module A is for the Chaopraya River Basin, which covers the northern part to the central plain and to the Gulf of Thailand, and Module B is for the rest of the country. Modules A and B include plans to build reservoirs, improve land-use controls, delineate catchment areas, improve the physical conditions of riverbanks, build flood diversion channels or flood ways (Figure 5-12), and to construct a flood database and flood warning centres.

Figure 5-12: Example of Flood Diversion Channel or Floodway

Source: Paasaa-Laak-Sri (2013)

As in many places around the world, these schemes proved to be lucrative contracts for external, private consultancies offering basic solutions. Private companies were invited by the Thai government to bid for these concessions, allowing them to define the details of these projects. Earlier, while the practice of public private partnership is not unknown to the government, the state would frame the study, conduct it and set the terms and conditions for the projects opening the bidding process. But in this instance, allowing the private actors to determine the rules meant that none of these schemes were subject to environment impact studies or public hearings. The Thai government budgeted 35 billion baht (approximately £7 billion) for these schemes. With such a huge budget at stake and an unfamiliar bidding process, these schemes would certainly be controversial. It was immediately clear that this was a knee-jerk reaction to a crisis with plenty of room for immense corruption.

The national flooding protection schemes have become a contentious issue in Thai society as to whether they are worth the investment and if they will actually solve flooding problems. Academics and the mass media have argued that the projects might be a waste and eventually condemned to failure. Firstly, all the projects related to these schemes have been tabled without any kind of feasibility or background study, with nothing specified in terms of their social, economic or environmental impact. Pramote Maiklad,[14] a renowned Thai water management expert, when interviewed by online news service Thai Publica[15] (2014) clarified that there was no techno-scientific expertise advising the government on these projects, and that after only three or four committee meetings over a two-month period, the government decided to launch them publicly. He said that these projects were not wrong, but they were not entirely

[14] Pramote Maiklad worked as a civil servant and held many important positions related to water management. He is a former Bangkok Senator, former Director General of Royal Irrigation Department, former Deputy Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, and former Office Chief of National Water Resources under the Secretariat of the Prime Minister. He was, and continues to be, responsible for many Royal Projects, including the Pasuk-Chonlasit Dam project. His qualifications as a water management expert speak for themselves and the general public likes to hear his opinions.

[15] Thai Publica is an online, investigative news service. Thai Publica is a 'watchdog' that examines and checks government projects for potential corruption and encourages sustainable development. Thai Public combines many highly experienced news reporters from various mass media backgrounds including the Mathichon newspaper founders, editors of The Bangkok Post, and academics from Thammasat University.

appropriate as they lacked proper pre-study, with some deemed unnecessary, and some unfeasible. This idea was reinforced with Marks's study (2015), who proposes that the 2011 flooding crisis was caused by human activities, haphazard Bangkok urban development and heavy rainfall; therefore, it is necessary to use a comprehensive approach to solve the disaster rather than conventional risk management (flooding infrastructure construction), which was the focus of the Thai government. Interpreting natural processes, ecological conditions, governance practices and other socio-political discourses more seriously is a better way to solve Thailand flooding problems than expecting technology and flooding protection infrastructure to cover the entire problem (Ziegler et al. 2012; Marks 2015).

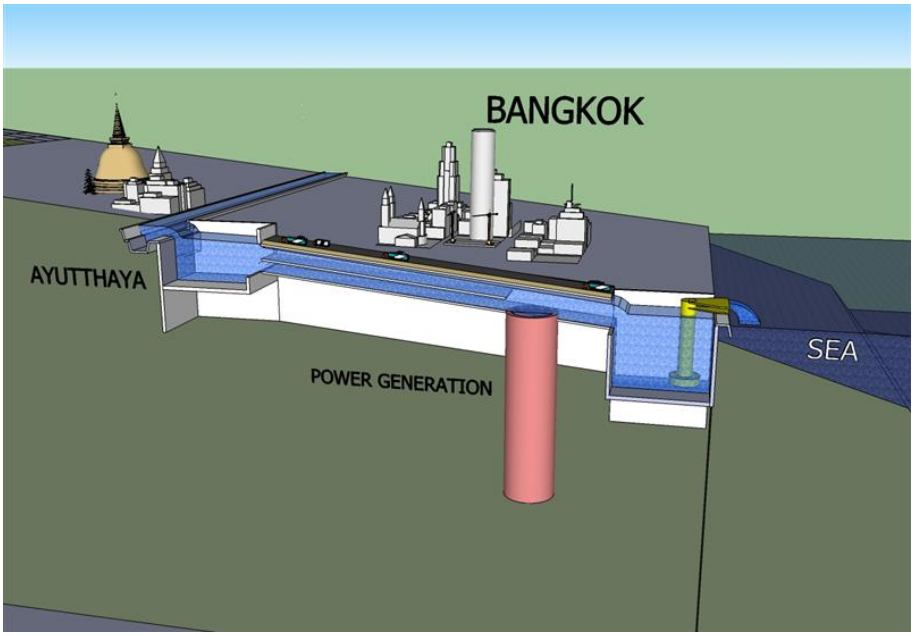
Despite the fear of non-proper studies of projects, there were no public hearings; however, the government insisted that they did have public hearings, but these were rather 'informational meetings', with few details provided. As a result, locals were not given the opportunity to express their ideas about the projects and some residents attended the meetings without any clear understanding of what the government was really doing. However, the government maintained that 70 to 80 per cent of people agreed that the projects should go ahead. Questions arose around the ongoing political instability in Thailand and whether under such an inclement political climate it would be prudent for the state to pursue these mega-projects. There were concerns about the possibility of protests during construction, delays if locals strongly disagreed and, a waste of money if a project was abandoned or cancelled. Moreover, the government proposed that all the projects would be completed within five years, which was overly ambitious or likely to result in poor construction. Academics were concerned and the public scoffed at the five-year plan. Many criticised opinions on the projects from academics, NGOs and local citizens who resided at the location of the projects, where the flooding protections scheme were severely delayed and finally cancelled by the Military Government who took power in 2014.

Unlike the national level schemes, those proposed within the BMR were small scale projects with an emphasis on quick-fix solutions. Falling under the control of local governments, they were mostly extant and improved-upon BMR projects, including the annual dredging and cleaning of local canals and rivers before the monsoon season with additional funds allocated by the national government. A great deal of effort is expended each year to remove silt, rubbish and aquatic weeds from canals and rivers in the BMR. Other projects involved the immediate cleaning of storm sewers and sanitary sewers in the BMR. Thirdly, the 2011 crisis revealed water management infrastructure in poor condition with immediate repairs needed for water pump stations and water gates in the BMR. Lastly, water drainage tunnel projects in the BMR, which were by no means new, were finally approved. Water drainage tunnels (Figure 5-13) aim to increase water drainage speed from the city to the sea, as shown in Figure 5-14.

Figure 5-13: An example of some parts of the BMR water drainage tunnels

Source: Department of Drainage and Sewerage (n.d.)

Figure 5-14: Picture showing how a water drainage tunnel works



Source: Admin (2012)

In fact, Bangkok already has seven existing water drainage tunnels, but they did not have enough capacity to handle the 2011 floods; four bigger drainage tunnels have since been proposed. It is envisioned that when all eleven tunnels are complete, they should provide relief for regular and severe floods in Bangkok. But this overwhelming reliance on techno-engineering solutions has opened up new areas of concern as residents worry about, not only the cost and feasibility of such solutions, but also given the history of such schemes, whether any of them will become a reality.

5.3.3.1 Engineering a solution

While broadly, the middle classes blamed the instability of Thai politics since the 2006 coup for the 2011 floods, their responses to the flood protection schemes were more specific, driven very much by their first-hand experiences. Although Bangna was one of the neighbourhoods that did not flood, residents experienced anxiety about whether the flood would reach their doorsteps at any moment, especially watching the sensational news coverage in television and print media, and also following the unreliable predictions from the State. As they expressed their struggle to safeguard their everyday living conditions, their difficulties were mostly curtailed to getting to and from work, as well as

accessing supplies (food, mostly) that were in short supply. On the other hand, for residents of Bangyai, the 2011 floods proved to be severe as the neighbourhood was submerged in two to three metres of water for nearly three months. Most of the residents were evacuated to government centres, or they stayed with friends and relatives elsewhere. After the floods, many Bangyai residents needed to make urgent repairs to their homes and orchards.

In this context, when residents in the two neighbourhoods were asked about the flood protection schemes announced at the national and local level, Bangna residents were suspicious and cynical about the proposal, especially at national level. From their patch of dry land, they showed little support for these schemes as the panic they felt during the floods did not last. In general, their area required little cleaning up and was not in immediate need of infrastructural interventions. As they chose not to follow the progress of these schemes, their concern was mainly restricted to how much money the government would invest in the projects and whether it would prove to be a drain on the taxpayers. This is not dissimilar to what Glassman (2010) expressed about the Bangkok middle classes and the fact that their economic politics was neither Keynesian nor neoliberal, but simply what suited them the best. Thus, Bangna residents tended to couch their scepticism as reservation over wasteful expenditure. For them, the need of the hour was not more new schemes but ensuring that the existing ones worked efficiently and effectively with little political interference.

> We already have a good flooding protection scheme, such as dams, the waterway express, water pump stations, etc., which were proposed by the King. Those schemes worked. For nearly 20 years ago, Bangna always flooded during rainy seasons. Since the King's flood protection schemes were implemented, we no longer face any flooding. The 2011 flood crisis was an exception. It was caused by politics and government mismanagement. We need to fix those from that point of view. It is not caused by nature or by the weak flooding protection equipment that we have. So why spend more money on flooding schemes? We would fix the wrong area if we did so. BN1213.

> What we need is to keep taking care of flood schemes/flood protection equipment that the King provided, and we need to control our urban growth by urban planning. We already have proper flood schemes that always work well. It just didn't work out in the last crisis because the last crisis was not from nature. It was caused by the poor management. Why spend more money on schemes that are not necessary?
> BN1206.

Given their royalist-nationalist proclivity, it does not come as a surprise that Bangna residents expressed satisfaction with the King's schemes, and instead emphasised fixing what they believed to be a current cycle of inefficient government functioning amidst an unstable political climate. Mismanagement and miscommunication were their keywords and they felt that the new schemes were part of unnecessary clientelism politics to secure the vote bank. In fact, for the middle class living in Bangna, flood prevention schemes were a hoax not dissimilar to previous efforts at producing an urban plan for the city. Both are simply paper exercises with little evidence of realisation on the ground. Drawing parallels with their overall perception of the city's urban planning process, these residents revealed their contempt for schemes as a political gimmick, one that portrays them as having done their duty by their public.

On the other hand, it is understandable that Bangyai middle class residents who were directly affected by the floods and spent months under water would view flood prevention schemes more favourably. While they acknowledged that solutions need to be a mix of quick fixes and long-term solutions, they sought reassurance from the State whose announcement of such projects were seen as a boost in morale boost. In the immediate aftermath of such floods, those affected are often plagued by concerns about whether they would have to suffer the same in the following year, and hence look, in the first instance, for quick fix solutions as a way of fool-proofing against floods in the near future. Well aware that long-term schemes take years to realise, Bangyai residents nevertheless supported them, as they were not only convinced about the necessity of such proposals but, more importantly, they were convinced that the Thai government would ensure their effectiveness, despite being aware that many such proposals end up as 'all talk and no action'. However, given their

vulnerability to the floods and their more harrowing first-hand experience, it is almost as if they have no choice but to repose their faith in the State to minimise flood consequences in the future. There is a definite element of middle class self-vested interest here as most residents insisted on not wanting to relive such a terrible experience and hence expressed their willingness to lend support to a government whose track record in delivering promises is poor, but a government able to allay their unease despite history.

5.3.4 Canal improvement schemes

In contrast to the above high-profile projects, a series of canal improvement schemes were announced at the same time, emerging as part of the smaller-scale flood prevention proposals at the local level. It involved draining canals throughout the BMR, building concrete banks along canals, setting up public boat transportation, and extending road transportation routes. Overall, residents from both Bangyai and Bangna supported these plans, but for different reasons.

Exotic canals

Bangkok originally began as a patchwork of two types of settlements, bang (literally 'water hamlet') or ban (village). Strung out along the Chao Phraya riverside and its maze of dug-canals and river tributaries, these settlements occupied floating or stilted houses and cultivated the orchards and rice fields that surrounded the small territorial nucleus settled by the elite. Nodal activities such as floating markets emerged at points where the canals connected with the river and this became a notable feature of Bangkok's early urbanism. Through the 19th century, canal construction grew as a way of supporting the city's economic growth. In fact, well into the 20th century, the traditional canal and river-based transport infrastructure of Bangkok supported its commercial expansion, serving to link the provinces to the capital and the various districts of the city. As Askew (2002:30) observes, "[t]his ecology dominated the commerce and everyday lives of Bangkokians well into the twentieth century and formed the grid which determined much of the city's modern layout". It was

this maze of canals that earned the city its nickname 'The Venice of the East'. A canal-based geography persisted until at least the mid-1950s when the city slowly made the transition to an automobile and road-based infrastructure. Canals continued to co-exist, remaining principal arteries of transport for at least another two decades. However, as road construction grew, they were being filled in or reduced to function as small roadside drains. In recent times canals have been restored for tourism (Tang and Jang 2010), indeed, many residents have forgotten the historic purposes of the canal infrastructure. Also, in neighbourhoods like Bangna, which is a 'new' development falling outside of the older settlement (marked by canals), their upper middle class lifestyle tends to romanticise the canals, with an exaggerated sense of pride over its western nickname 'Venice of the East'. Physically removed from the canals, Bangna residents deride what the canals have become over the past few years, and it is an indication of the city's 'unplanned urbanisation', with several of them describing the canals as polluted, dirty and smelly. Canal improvement plans were not so much about resolving flooding challenges but initiating crucial environmental improvements to the city's landscape, making the city, not only a pleasant place to live, but also attracting more tourists.

Canals as infrastructure

For Bangyai residents there is an element of practicality to the canal improvement works that are essentially seen as an infrastructure improvement programme. It is not so much about the restoration of an aesthetic landscape, as it is about crucial infrastructure. Given their recent experience of flooding, they perceive canals as an important natural tool for draining water. However, to sustain this function, canals need to be dredged and maintained regularly as they are key to carrying excess flood water to the sea. Unfortunately, the replacement of river-transport with an automobile-dependent system, meant that most canals have fallen into disrepair, filled in, and no longer available as part of an extended natural drain network. This has been exasperated by reckless construction along canal banks (Figure 5-15).

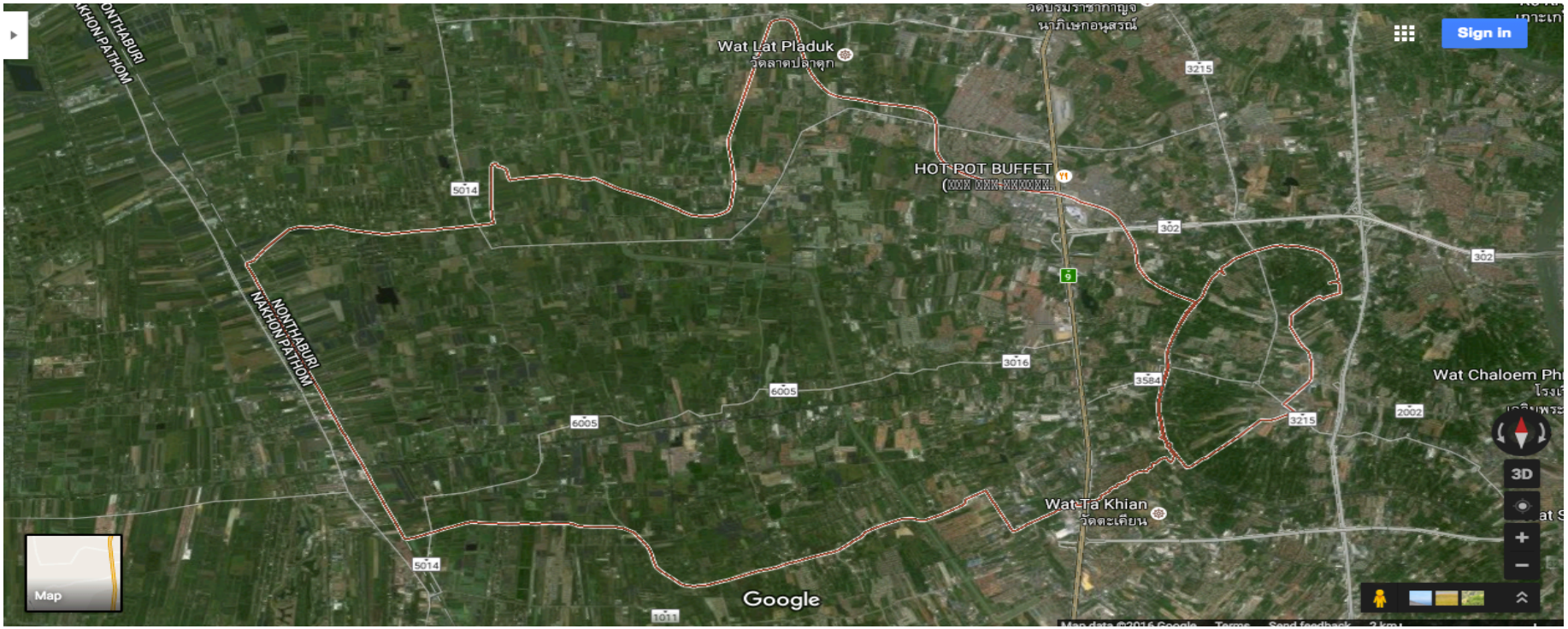
Figure 5-15: Properties built over canals

Source: Researcher (15th August, 2012)

For Bangyai residents whose families have lived in the area for decades, they recognise its original condition as a swamp intricately connecting a network of canals, that was not only physically crucial to the area's low-lying geography, but was also tied to their socio-economic lifestyle. Growing fruit and rice are important occupations in Bangyai, which is dominated by orchards and rice paddies and the canal system is important for irrigation (Figure 5-16). Locals rely on canals running through and alongside their properties for their crops.

Figure 5-16: A satellite image of Bangyai district

The red line represents the border of Bangyai District. Many areas in the district shown in the satellite image are in green, which means they are mostly occupied by agricultural land-use activities.



Source: Google Map (17th September 2016)

Figure 5-17: A canal network in Bangyai District.

Canals also connect to other provinces. Canals are present in blue lines, while red lines represent borders of Bangyai District. It can be seen that most of them are connected, so it would not be hard to use canals as an alterative transportation around the district.

Source: Google Map (17th September 2016)

These canal networks (Figure 5-17) still function as transportation infrastructure in the area. Older residents reminisce about times they could travel almost everywhere by boat, living up to the city's reputation as the 'Venice of the East', until a few decades ago when road construction took over with automotive modes of transport and canals were slowly filled up. Some residents claim to still have boats, docked and ready for use (Figure 5-18). They said that they use the boats occasionally to visit their neighbours, go to local markets and the temple. Travelling by boat is one way of escaping traffic jams. They said that they could also travel by boat to the Bangkok city centre, as there are some public boat docks in the area, a good alternative as it is faster than travelling by car during rush hour.

Figure 5-18: Local residences in Bangyai with boat docks by their houses

Source: Researcher (15th August, 2012)

Finally, the middle class in Bangyai believe that their canals can be improved to attract tourists. They have local floating markets, religious activities on or near the water, and traditional orchards that could well serve as tourist destinations. For Bangyai residents, developing the canals as part of a tourist infrastructure would be an economic bonus, cleaning up the area, increasing job opportunities and improving their living conditions in general. The argument put forward by some residents is that if the State invested in infrastructure improvements, then the residents would be motivated to take better care of the canals themselves, automatically solving drainage problems that lead to flooding.

5.4 Conclusion

Since the 2006 coup, there has been a visibly sharp polarisation of political consciousness amongst Bangkok's middle classes, roughly between the upper and lower middle classes (though this is a crude assumption). This has had a considerable influence on their quotidian politics, and this manifests in their everyday lives. This chapter, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of how this is played out, examined middle class perceptions of planning a city like Bangkok. At nearly 40 per cent of BMR's labour force, the middle classes constitute an important presence in the city, crucial to safeguarding the interests of a Thai-style democracy. With a central role in the country's slip towards post-democracy (Glassman 2010), it is uncertain whether the middle class would unequivocally support Bangkok's movement towards modernisation and globalisation. It is in this context that this chapter examined middle class responses to State efforts at developing an urban plan for Bangkok. While a broad scepticism of any kind of plan to countermand what is often considered an unplanned process of urbanisation is not unique to Bangkok's middle classes, there are aspects of their reservation that are more specific to Thailand's political context. Urban planning here is deemed a political instrument, an argument that is not dissimilar to Shatkin's (2004) findings from other Southeast Asian cities. However, through a more detailed investigation of what exactly it is about the urban plan that leads to a wary middle classes, this chapter finds that such cautiousness is influenced by their political positioning, with the upper middle classes desirous of planning as a top-down bureaucratic process,

while the lower middle classes do not mind planning being appropriated by politicians as part of their vote bank politics. While seemingly an oversimplification, this binary illustrates not only the heterogeneity of the middle classes, but also the way it is complicated by the political subscriptions of the middle classes, one that is not easily predicted (at least in the case of Thailand).

This was further substantiated in their responses to the recent floods of 2011 which to many was a clear indication of the failure of the urban plan. While the middle classes in general agreed that the floods were essentially a failure of the State to take timely and appropriate action, there was little consensus between the upper and the lower middle classes when it came to the State's post-flood response in terms of announcing a flurry of flood protection schemes. Living in an area that was little affected by the floods, Bangna residents chided the government for wasting taxpayers' money on projects that will never see the light of the day, and even if realised, will not be effective against the next round of floods. Such a reaction is not surprising as the middle classes are generally sceptical of such announcements that tend to be populist with little techno-scientific rationale. They view them as a waste of taxpayers' money and condemned them with the same spirit they dismissed the prospects of urban planning for Bangkok. On the other hand, Bangyai residents who were badly affected by the floods, enduring several months of living in deep water, they could not but repose faith in the State as they recognised that such floods can only be addressed through mega-engineering solutions, given that they were a mega-infrastructure failure in the first instance. While the support for the State is given conditionally and warily, Bangyai residents, with their tendency to rely on political patronage felt that this was a viable solution. Such a differentiation was clear in their reactions to canal improvement programmes as well. With zero canals criss-crossing their neighbourhood, upper middle class residents in Bangna held a nostalgia viewpoint of proposals to revamp the canals, viewing it as an aesthetically pleasing environmental improvement. However, for Bangyai residents whose socio-economic lifestyle is closely interwoven with the network of canals, these schemes were not only about restoring the glory of the past but

also about securing their livelihood. Through this ethnographic unpacking of a not so straightforward relationship between the middle class and the urban planning process, this chapter shows how polarisations triggered by broader national politics trickled down and defined everyday politics of the middle classes. The issue here is not only about the categorisation of the middle class, but also their shifting political loyalties while safeguarding their own interests. What this emphasises is a more cautious approach to our study of middle classes resisting tendencies to draw generalisations of their actions and reactions.

Chapter 6 Mobility in a fractured city

6.1 Introduction

> Bangkok SkyTrain (BTS) will not only provide an alternative public transportation mode, for it will also help solve traffic congestion. We may not yet see the outcome of the BTS clearly at the moment. However, the BTS will relieve traffic congestion in the city when the whole system is fully operational. The BTS will also help shape the city's growth and the building up of an image of a contemporary Bangkok.
> Scholar 21, Acting Director Policy and Strategy, Bureau of Thailand Ministry of Transport.

In the aftermath of the 2011 floods, an article appeared in the Bangkok Post (Marks and Brown 2014) criticising the government (be it they democratically elected or the military Junta) for introducing a pro car ownership policy in the post-flood scenario, and failing instead to improve Bangkok's public transportation sector through a much needed integrated rail plan. They especially made a plea for rapidly expanding the mass rapid transit system in the city, emphasising that it would not only improve the quality of life but also spur economic growth, while lending credibility to the military government. Citing a UK study that found that for every dollar invested in urban mass transit, three and a half times that in economic activity and efficiency gains are generated, Marks and Brown (2014) reposed their confidence in schemes such as the Bangkok SkyTrain (BTS), Metropolitan Rapid Transit (MRT) and Airport Rail Link (ARL) as networks crucial to a city with a congested road space reeling with sustainability concerns around emissions, stress, noise and commuting length. Their optimism is in contrast to academics who argue that the benefits of such mega infrastructure projects are often overestimated by politicians and policymakers (Siemiatycki 2006). As the article states, such projects tend to be fraught with delays and spiralling costs and often end up being implemented in fragments. Initial public optimism often wanes against their failure to deliver universal affordability as they engender high expectations regarding commercial activities, urban development and/or the relief of traffic problems, but fail to reach their goals (Flyvberg et al. 2003). This is in fact the main

argument of Siemiatycki (2006) in his analysis of the Delhi Metro where, despite its positive image, the metro is not a mode of transport that is available to all sections of society, thereby failing to address the city's transport challenges in an inclusive manner. Instead, the metro was touted through deliberate image building as one with tangible transportation benefits for the middle class, emphasising safety and comfort. This is not dissimilar to Boschken (1998; 2003) and Stone (1980) who found that mega infrastructure schemes involving light rail transit are geared towards the interests of the upper middle class.

While the key decisions still depend on the government and revolve around internal factors such as cost, administrative convenience, professional considerations, and more importantly the role of such projects in swaying voters, it is generally believed that certain social classes are capable of influencing government decisions about their fate. In particular, Boschken (1998) draws on Stone's (1980) argument of "systemic power" to suggest that the upper middle class has a determinant role in influencing urban development policy making, arguing that such infrastructure is often found in middle class localities, thereby soliciting their immediate support. After all, it is the middle classes who are generally presumed to interact with top-rung public services, politicians, providers and the related social context, creating disproportionate benefits for themselves as service users especially as they pose, not only as interest groups and individual consumers, but also in occupying important positions in the bureaucracy, wielding much influence over the public and organisational processes (Matthews and Hastings 2013). It is thus that one often finds the middle class manipulating benefits from the public services, aligned as they are with the policy makers and service providers, and through their consuming power deeming them able to guarantee a response from the authorities in their favour.

Moreover, mega infrastructure projects have proven to be crucial in boosting the image of governments, as they seek to project a modern identity (either as a global city or a regional hub) and reaffirm their own standing in terms of national and political strength while seeking to solve everyday

problems of traffic congestion and sustainable living (Van Der Westhuizen 2007). It is not uncommon to find such projects announced in liaison with mega events such as the Olympic Games, World Expo or the FIFA World Cup when they are assured of high visibility and publicity. It is even suggested that the drawing board Delhi Metro received a much needed boost through hosting the 2010 Commonwealth Games, which pushed the government to accelerate the realisation of the much delayed project. In these cases, it is contended that transit oriented mega-infrastructure projects are merely a form of political symbol and do not rationally address the city's everyday infrastructure needs (Van Der Westhuizen 2007). As they are driven by political rhetoric, they often overlook the needs of the poor, who consequently reap little benefit from such projects.

It is against these arguments that a more cautious approach to a mass rapid transit solution such as the BTS is needed, as there is a suspicion that the motivations might not be very different from what is found in other places. This is corroborated, to a large extent, by recent scholarship on the BTS. While at first glance, the BTS might seem to contribute to improving Bangkok's image as a modernising global city, as it transports commuters smoothly and quickly across the city (Isarangkul na Ayutthaya 2005), a closer look at its impact reveals a darker side to its everyday reality. Thus, in the first instance, there are those who have found the BTS to have had a profound impact on Bangkok's physical urban development, particularly its land use (Bray and Sayong 2002; Kongsomsuksiri 2006; Putthilerpong 2009; Sirikolkarn 2008; Lilarmnanotham 1994). In this respect, Jenks (2003) observed how the SkyTrain had stimulated new forms of land development in the vicinity of its stations, including high–rise condominiums, multi–function high–rise buildings and consumption corridors, all of which have led to vertically divided land use: a world above and a world below (Jenks 2003). The above refers to the aspects of the city linked to the globalised world comprising international business offices, five star hotels and international brand names in shopping centres, whereas below is a place of street food, local shops, hawkers and dust pollution (Jenks 2003; 2004). In essence, the SkyTrain has segregated the rich and poor in a vertical geography,

with the rich living and moving above ground linked by the BTS network, and the poor residing below with far lower mobility (Jenks 2004). Besides having an impact on urban development, the BTS has contributed to the image of Bangkok as a modern city (Isarangkul na Ayutthaya 2005). This is because the BTS shows Bangkok as having the same quality and variety of transportation as first world cities with the BTS rail running around the city, reflecting modern technology. Secondly, there are studies relating to how the execution of the BTS project has accentuated the polarisation of the cityscape by favouring the middle classes. Regarding which, a point picked up by Jensen (2007) who asserts that the BTS has created social segregation among Bangkok citizens through the location of stations and restrictive ticket prices. Consequently, it has only served the interests of the middle classes and thus, has failed to deliver broader benefits to the city (Jenks 2003; Richardson and Jensen 2008; Bae and Suthiranarat 2003).

The third analytical strand concerns the underperformance of the BTS, which is an issue that has gained much attention amongst academics, the Thai government, and Bangkok citizens. Similar to the case of the Delhi Metro, the BTS has yet to deliver the project's main purpose; solving Bangkok's traffic woes. Several studies have investigated why the BTS has consistently underperformed and what could be done in terms of improvement. Indeed, the main reason the BTS has not provided Bangkok with a traffic solution is because most people do not use it (Bengtsson 2006). This is because car ownership is a significant status signifier, and with government policies continuing to favour car ownership and encouraging first-time buyers (often an electoral ploy to attract voters), it means that the BTS network coverage remains limited. BTS stations are often located some distance from residential neighbourhoods, and such proximity as well as its inter-modal transport connections have become an issue (Townsend and Zachrias 2010; Bray and Sayeng 2002; Shannon and Lockshin 2000). Moreover, the general negative perceptions of public services as unsafe, unreliable and dirty are also considered as a significant reason for residents not favouring the BTS as their preferred mode of travel (Charoenkulpeeti el al. 2008). Social and economic factors, such as level of income and types of occupation, can also have an impact on commuters'

decisions as to whether to include the BTS in their travel pattern (Choiejit 2005). Shannon and Lockshin's (2000) study finds that those responsible for BTS development showed a profound lack of understanding of Thai commuter behaviour when designing the system's services. The author particularly highlights Thai culture's emphasis on car ownership as a status symbol, the aversion well-to-do Bangkok residents have to walking long distances in a constantly hot weather, and the fact that most are not concerned about their travel time, thus do not value the reduction in the duration of their journeys that the SkyTrain can provide. Hence, for usage to improve, there needs to be much clearer understanding of the way decisions are made by Bangkokians as far as their travel choices are concerned (Punpuing and Ross 2001). In particular, connecting the BTS to bus stops, coach stations, ferries, and rail stations is one of the suggestions put forward for improving performance. That is, it is contended that accessibility to the system through connections with other modes of transport is as a potential workable solution (Manasomboon 2008).

While the above remain policy concerns at an everyday level, there is a larger political scene in terms of mega infrastructure projects such as the BTS, where it evolves from its initial conception as a political symbol occupying a central position within the modern political debate, especially when it comes to decisions regarding its extension and transition into an everyday infrastructure. This means that as a transport policy, key decisions pertaining to the BTS are manipulated by political elites, and early promises of using schemes such as the BTS to resolve the city's traffic problems are lost in the murkiness of political wrangling, and where it gets reduced to rhetoric during electoral campaigns. Thus, while existing studies on the BTS have revealed its everyday shortcomings, what is missing is perhaps a more careful understanding of how the middle classes use such a mega infrastructure project in developing their own political agency within the city, especially during moments of post-democracy such as today. In this instance, it would be too simplistic to assume that these are middle class developments even though they might favour them in terms of their initial rationale (Bae and Suthiranart 2003). The argument this dissertation makes is that conclusions from scholarship presenting the BTS as

an example of the hegemony wielded by the middle class in framing the direction of urban development is rushed. While such projects, at the time of announcement, might target the middle class for their patronage, there is no clear evidence that when it is operationalised, who the main beneficiaries are. Neither is it clear if middle class support endures and sustains. This is because middle class decisions on their position vis à vis a mega infrastructure project such as the BTS hinges, not only on how they manage their everyday routine, but also on their larger politics and the more important issue of safeguarding their political role.

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine the extent to which political framings of the Bangkok middle classes influenced their viewpoint of the SkyTrain, especially at moments of key decision making as to extensions and further implementation, and they become important electoral agenda in a context of chronic political instability. Also, as seen from Chapter 5, it is clear that while the middle classes may reap the benefits of certain development schemes, their sustained support is not assured, especially given the splintering heterogeneity of the middle classes and the contradictions it generates in efforts to create a single middle class discourse. Following on from the previous chapter, middle classes are explored along upper and lower division lines and whether it reveals a clear distinction in the way they frame themselves against prominent urban development proposals. Extending Boschken's (1998, 2003) assertion about the upper middle class, this chapter considers whether it applies in the case of Bangkok, and if the opposite holds true for the lower middle class or the two remind us once again about, not only the uncertainty of an obvious middle class discourse, but also against taking them for granted. This chapter is structured as follows. In the next section, a brief history of Bangkok transportation policy and rail mass transit development is provided. This section also contains an explanation regarding how light rail was chosen for the city and the original objectives. Section 6.3 explains how, why and when a marked shift took place away from seeking Bangkok-wide transportation solutions for all, to developing proposals more geared towards fulfilling middle class transportation concerns. Given this shift, Section 6.4 investigates the

backdrop through the analysis of interview data collected to obtain the views of the middle classes from the two selected neighbourhoods of Bangna and Bangyai regarding the extent to which a mass rail transit system such as the BTS interfaces with their everyday lives. This section also probes how the two sections of the middle class view the benefits of the BTS and whether there is a consistency to this narrative. Section 6.5 discusses the fractured nature of their responses and their overall inability to provide a coherent discourse regarding an important mega-infrastructure project, one that at a top-down level has been framed as targeting the middle class, and yet is not embraced enthusiastically by this group.

6.2 Bangkok's transportation system: A historical overview

> Thai government policies encourage Bangkokians to use private modes of transport…there is an absence of policy to restrict cars…the focus is on transportation policies for road construction…subsidising of fuel and expressways tickets…absence of an effective land use planning system causes poor access to public transport. (Charoentrakulpeeti et al. 2006, 705-707)

Bangkok's serious traffic problems began more than a century ago when during its quasi-colonisation era, different reigns embraced an active road building agenda. As Askew (2002) shows in his historical analysis, by the mid-19th century, the traditional canal and river-based transport infrastructure of Bangkok was beginning to be replaced by roads, leading to the commodification of land. Road building was seen as a commitment to a wide ranging project of modernisation and by the beginning of the 20th century, over 120 roads were built under King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) (*ibid.*). While the roads were meant to encourage trade and revenue, they also led to a settlement process that developed its own dynamic. In the years following World War II, Bangkok evolved into an automobile city with tacit support of the government, industry and the urban middle classes. As the canals fell into disuse, roads became the predominant mode of transport, and quickly became inadequate to meet the demands of a city that was not only the capital, but was also the primate city of Thailand. The Thai government in the 1950s and 1960s followed the general

trend of Americanisation when American consultants were appointed to produce master plans for a rapidly growing city, as illustrated in the Great Bangkok Plan 2533 (1990);[16] an urban plan produced by American consultants, Litchfield Whiting Bowne and Associates. With regard to transportation improvement and development, the plan proposed the construction of over 30 main roads in a network including a ring road (Kamanamool 2004). These proposals were driven by the desire to reinforce Bangkok an "automotive city" (Kamanamool 2004; Cholasit 2005). Consequently, "Bangkok's pattern of urbanisation was driven by road networks rather than by land use regulations or development controls and hence, throughout the years followed in the footsteps of Los Angeles" (Sintusihgha 2011: 149).

6.2.1 Transportation Chaos

However, the policies adopted for Bangkok exasperated the traffic chaos rather than providing an effective solution. Charoentrakulpeeti et al. (2006) are convinced that the failure of the government to find a transportation solution hinged on the fact that Thai policy makers were fixated on the view that for new transportation infrastructure, the focus should be on increasing road system capacity to meet demand. To this end, 10 billion THB was spent on road construction from 1977 to 1981 and a further 20 billion THB between 1982 and 1986 (Rujopakarn 2003). Public transportation received little investment, and as a result of which, buses and paratransit vehicles thrived to move the general public around the city.[17] Otherwise, people overwhelmingly used private transport. More automobiles on the roads and increased competition between public and private modes of transport for road occupancy led to a structural inability of the roads to cope with vehicle capacity and hence, severe traffic congestion occurred on daily basis.

[16] Appendix 1.

[17] Paratransit is a form of feeder transportation that is usually provided by private operators. For example, a taxi transporting a person from point A to either a bus station or underground station is one form of a paratransit vehicle.

Table 6-1: Total numbers of vehicles registered in Bangkok in 1994, 2003 and 2010

Vehicle Types	1994	2003	2010	Growth	
				Annual	Total
Car	738,847	1,225,932	3,467,252	194,886	2,728,405
Motorcycle	851,853	857,460	2,446,267	113,887	1,594,414
Bus	17,457	26,225	34,787	1,238	17,330
Truck	73,145	75,800	113,854	2,908	40,709
Others	503,927	706,300	223,742	N/A	N/A

Source: Asian Development Bank, 2005 and Office of Transport and Traffic Policy and Planning, 2010, cited in Tulyasuwan, 2013.

Table 6-1 shows the increasing number of vehicles in Bangkok during the late 20th century before rail mass transit operated, to the early 21st century after rail mass transit had begun to operate. Use of cars and motorcycles increased dramatically, while buses and trucks slowly increased. However, other types of registered vehicles actually declined sharply after 2003. In fact, there was an over 50 per cent increase in registered cars during 2003-2010. The trend of car ownership is remains on an upward treand. This is because government policy on transport issues encouraged citizens to own private vehicles. Police amidst a context of inadequate traffic control, and the government subsidised fuel prices and expressway fees (Bae and Suthiranarat 2003; Charoentrakulpeeti et al. 2006). As a result, traffic speeds averaged around 9km per hour in normal traffic and during rush hour, this fell to 2km per hour. In other words, the traffic was barely moving (Pianuan et al. 1994).

6.2.2 BTS as a solution

During the early 1970s, when the Thai government became increasingly concerned about the traffic situation, they brought in the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, which produced the first comprehensive Bangkok Transportation Study (Rujopakarn 2003). The subsequent report criticised the weak public transportation services and policies encouraging the use of private

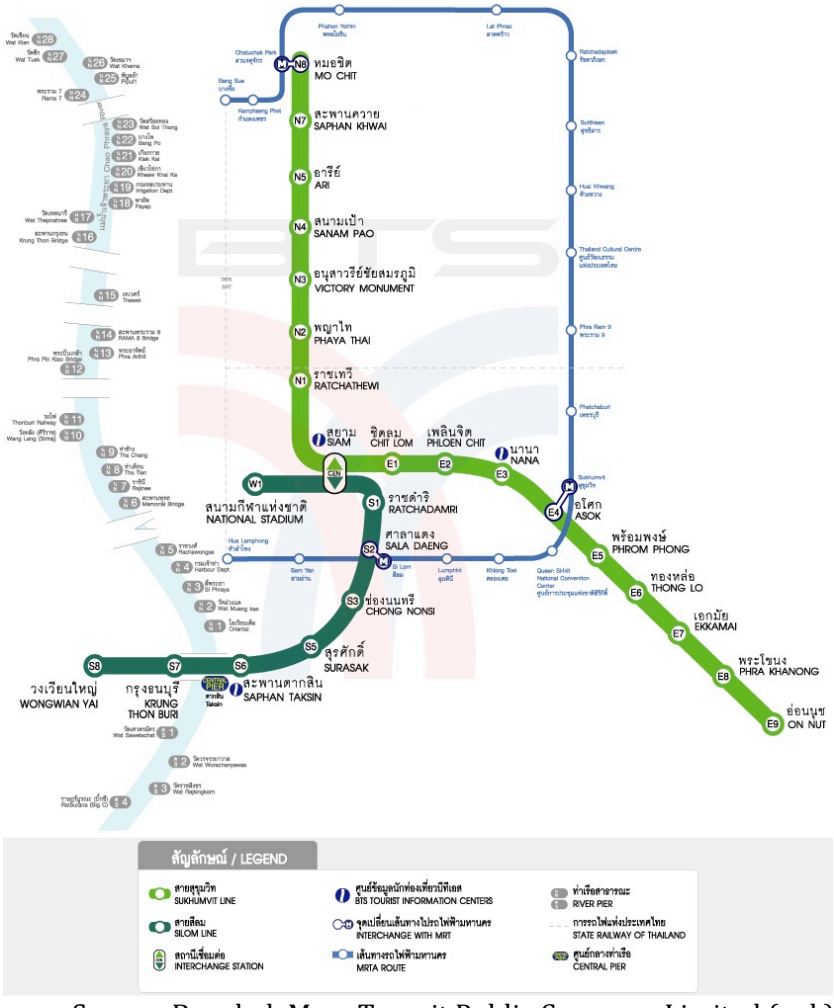
cars. It concluded that the Thai government should mainly support public transportation policies by constructing mass transit systems and expressways under a public transportation policy that restricted car ownership in addition to creating a polycentric urban configuration. Specifically, three rail mass transit lines were proposed to be constructed and completed by 1990. Several studies (see Tanaboriboon 1993; Kenworthy 1995; Du Pont and Egain 1997) provide evidential support for rail mass transit transportation as a solution to traffic problems. In essence, the proposals in the Bangkok Transportation Study's report recommended that the Thai government change its policy trajectory from one of moving vehicles for moving people. However, owing to a lack of budget and political support, the plans were put on hold. Kamanamool (2004) asserted in his study, *Technology of public transportation in the city: Bangkok mass rapid transit system*, transportation projects related to automobiles such as expressways, ring roads and roads were incredibly successful; however, rail mass transit projects were failing. He argued that, besides a limited national budget that had to be spent on developing other parts of the country, the government and politicians did not see the crucial needs of rail mass transit development (ibid.). Bangkok citizens enjoyed riding in private cars, so road construction was seen as a more efficient way to satisfy Bangkok citizens. In the early 1990s, Bangkok traffic congestion had become severe and the trend of modern Bangkok during the economic boom era had emerged (see Chapter 1). By this point, the Thai government may have realised that they should have seriously delivered rail mass transit system to the city.

Eventually, in 1993, the government tasked the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) to initiate a bidding process for rail mass transit in Bangkok and the BMA awarded the project to the Bangkok Mass Transit System (BTS) Public Company Limited, a private company. BTS Public Company Limited is 100 per cent non-government agency led. The company took a risk where many companies, including government agencies, were afraid of unsuccessfully operating the SkyTrain in the BMR.

> The chairman of the company believed that the company would be able to successfully operate the first rail mass transit systems, aimed to be the leading provider of rail mass transit systems. Moreover, other big cities in the world already have a rail mass transit system. With the traffic congestion problem of Bangkok, we see the need of rail mass transit development. Scholar 20, Executive Director of BTS Group Holding Co. Ltd.

Working with the BMA, BTS Public Company Limited constructed the first Bangkok SkyTrain routes that were approved by BMA policy makers and the Ministry of Transport. In 1999, the first rail mass transit system opened to the public were the Green Lines (see Figure 6-1), which were 23.5 kilometres long with 26 stations comprising two branches intersecting at Siam station, one of the most important junctions in the CBD.

Figure 6-1: Bangkok Rail Mass Transit Systems Map in 2004



Source: Bangkok Mass Transit Public Company Limited (n.d.)

In 2000, the Thai government established the Mass Transit Rapid Authority of Thailand (MRTA), a public-private company operating under the Ministry of Transport, tasked with constructing the first underground system (the Blue Line) in Thailand. In 2004, the Blue Line started operating with 18 underground stations over 20km length with two connecting interchanges with the BTS at Asoke and Morchit stations (see Figure 6-1). However, the underground system was expensive and did not connect many residential areas to the CBD. Due to the limited area covered by this service, this system has mainly functioned as a feeder route to final destinations served by the BTS, operating mainly to and from middle class residential zones in the northeast of Bangkok.

Once the original Green Lines of the BTS were fully operational, passenger numbers were between 300,000 and 350,000 per week day, much below the estimated number of 600,000. This triggered concerns that the BTS would not solve Bangkok's traffic problems. One of the local newspapers (Figure 6-2) discussed this matter, asserting that rail mass transit services proved to be an irrelevant way of tackling these problems. Given the limited spread of BTS lines, in most instances, commuters use paratransit from the stations to their destination. As a result, those who owned cars found little incentive to shift to the BTS.

Figure 6-2: Traffic Congestion, Bangkok severe problem, can rail mass transit systems really help? (Original in Thai, translated into English by author)

Traffic Congestion, Bangkok severe problem, can rail mass transit systems really help?

Bangkok ranks as the 15th largest capital city in the world. It is home to 13 million of the 65 million Thais. The Rail mass transit system was introduced to help solve the traffic congestion problems of the city and it is about to be extended to cover the whole of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR). Nevertheless, some people doubt that rail mass transit systems can relieve Bangkok's problems.

Rail mass rapid transit has limitations regarding accessibility and restrictive ticket pricing. The current government has been pushing rail mass transit forward, but these developments are going ahead without connections to any other types of public transport or land-use management. As a result, travelling from home to a rail mass transit station is difficult for the Bangkokian and so, the government needs to improve the feeder transportation system. Moreover, the ticket prices are considered to be expensive for most Bangkokians, particularly the poor and the lower middle classes, which is a strong obstacle to these groups using rail mass transit. The government should have more policies to deal with this problem and urge people to use rail mass transit more so that it serves the citizens in its full capacity...The Bangkokians are still using cars and there is a continuously increasing number of private vehicle registrations. There are no restraining policies on car–ownership or any policies to control car usage in the city. Thais still prefer to use a private car…Rail mass transit or any other public transportation will not be able to solve the public congestion problem in Bangkok as long as the Bangkokians still find it easy and convenient to use private cars. No matter how good the rail mass transit system is with its efficient services, it might not be able to solve the city's traffic problems.

Studies on Bangkok's commuting patterns, such as that by Manasomboon (2008), show that the private car continued to be the aspirational mode of transport after the opening of the BTS, and so the city's traffic problems continued to worsen; in several parts of the city the roads had considerably narrowed after their takeover for the installation of pylons supporting the BTS lines. This perspective is supported by statistics published by the Office of

Transport and Public Policy and Planning in 2007 (Table 6-2), which projected a significant and continual increase in private transportation, whilst public road services are expected to decline.

Table 6-2: Percentage of private and public transportation usage in Bangkok

Percentage numbers of Bangkokians using transportation type/ year	2005	2016	2026
Private Transportation	54.5	55.1	59.1
Public transportation	45.5	44.9	40.9

Source: Office of Transport and Public Policy and Planning (2007)

What was missing was a carefully constructed campaign by the authorities to convince Bangkokians to make the shift from private to public modes of transport, instead of simply building the solution, and leaving it to chance.

6.3 BTS: a middle class mode of mobility

Since most rail mass transit projects are considered to be an efficient way of moving large numbers of people around in a big city (Richmond 1998; Siemiatycki 2005; Fourance, Dukerley, and Gardener 2003; Siemiatycki 2006), the BTS was perceived as an effective public transportation solution for Bangkok, as it would relieve traffic congestion by eventually persuading commuters to switch from private to public transportation (Fourance, Dukerley, and Gardener 2003; Siemiatycki 2006). However, as pointed out, the SkyTrain system failed to evolve into a comprehensive public transportation solution. It was found that certain demographic, socioeconomic and household factors came into play when determining commuting patterns, which often act as obstacles when trying to convince some sections of the population to switch their transportation mode (Choiejit 2005). In fact, the system seems to mainly have served one particular group of society, the middle classes. The promotion of the system as being safe and comfortable (Hoskins 2000) meant there was a shift in the perception of it being a mega-infrastructure traffic solution for the masses to a viable option for one particular social group alone, i.e. the middle

classes. This was clearly reflected in the demographic profiles of the majority of BTS users.

Accordingly, over the years, there has been a shift in policy where, instead of seeking to solve Bangkok's traffic and transportation problems through mass rapid transport, schemes such as the BTS have been redefined as high-end alternatives to the car, targeting the middle classes. Thus, policy makers and the BTS have concluded that as Bangkok's middle classes are the main users of the BTS, they must focus attention on the middle class to increase the numbers of passengers and improve performance.

> According to our studies, it cannot be denied that the middle classes form the majority of BTS users. We are BTS providers. We need to improve our service to meet our customers' demands. As you can see, BTS performance has been continuously increased for the past 5-6 years, whereby we have been improved our services, such as park & ride, ticket promotions and installation of escalators, to satisfy our customers, the middle classes.
> Scholar 20, Executive Director of BTS Group Holding Co. Ltd

> We have now realised that the key driver of the BTS is the middle classes. Other classes don't use the BTS for many reasons such as expensive tickets and where the routes go. What we need to do is to encourage the middle classes to use the BTS more. Then, the BTS will be able to deliver benefits to all of Bangkok's citizens.
> Scholar 08, Head of Rail Transport Group, Ministry of Transport.

Nearly a decade after Bangkok's rail mass transit system began operating, the SkyTrain's number of passengers per weekday started to increase. In 2008, the number reached 400,000 people per weekday and this figure rose to 500,000 by 2011 (Bangkok Mass Transit Public Company Limited n.d.), with a projected increasing trend. According to Kongsomsiri's (2006) study, 40.2 per cent of these were white-collar workers, 37.5 per cent were students from middle class families, and 23.3 per cent were foreign workers or tourists. Similarly, Richardson and Jensen (2008) identified three types of users: middle class shoppers, business people and tourists.

This middle class predominance of BTS users could be attributed to the location of its services, in particular, its stations. Regarding which, the current routes operate mainly in central Bangkok, which are considered middle class working and residential areas. That is, it is generally perceived that a characteristic of Bangkok is that the middle and upper classes live inside and the poor live outside. The arrival of the BTS had a dramatic impact on development as those who wanted to be located near its stations for convenience competed for land, which led to property prices skyrocketing (Putthilerpong 2009). As a result, only the richer middle and upper classes could afford to live in these city centre locations and thus, with the poor were pushed out from the most of the city centre, exasperating the earlier spatial class divisions became much more profound. This situation led to an inequality of access to the BTS, where the poor lived so far away from the stations that using the system was pointless owing to the extra time and costs involved in travelling.

However, the planning process of the BTS did not involve choosing to operate in middle class areas, for other factors were the key drivers. Regarding which, during an interview Mr. Varayu Prateepasaen explained in his interview that the mass transit routes were chosen according to population density, economic activities and the physical geography of the city. In other words, middle class interests did not directly factor into the initial rail mass transit planning processes. He also explained that a key aim was to link the city's periphery with the CBD as proposed in the URMAP, but this did not happen and so, the less well-off had no access to the system. As a result, the BTS only operated in middle class areas, despite this not being one of the goals of the proposed plan.

With the increasing number of BTS passengers being mainly the middle classes, these stimulated Thai policy makers shifted their future planning around this specific class group. That is, they believed the best way to improve performance and hence, alleviate traffic congestion, was to promote the SkyTrain as a middle class mode of transport. According to a survey of SkyTrain

users by Bray and Sayeg (2002), 75% came from households that had at least one car and the vast majority of these were middle class users. Thus, it was argued that those of the middle class who were not yet using the SkyTrain were very likely car users and if they were to switch to the SkyTrain, there would be fewer cars on the road.

> We need to keep the middle class as BTS users and we need to motivate more of the middle classes to include the BTS in their commuting pattern. This is because the middle classes are the main Bangkok car users. If the middle class stops using the BTS, the number of cars on the street will increase. If we can motivate middle class to the use BTS and park their car at home or in BTS car parks, we will be able to relieve Bangkok's traffic since there will be fewer cars on the roads.
> Scholar 08, Head of Rail Transport Group, Ministry of Transport.

In line with the above perspective, the policy makers introduced two main BTS policies to encourage more middle class users: keeping fares fairly high and installing Park & Ride facilities. First of all, current BTS fares are too high for many low-income earners to use the rapid transit system (Townsend and Zacharias 2010: 329). When comparing ticket prices with other public transport services, in particular bus fares (Table 6-3), the differences are notable.

Table 6-3: Comparison of public transportation prices in Bangkok

Public Transportation type	Baht[18] per Journey
BTS Fare	20-55
Buses Fare	3.5 -20
Motorcycle Taxi Fare	5-50 (Price dependent on distance)
Bunker or Pick-up Truck Fare	5-40 (Price dependent on distance)

It may appear that is an unclear BTS fare, and that other public transportation fares are significantly different. However, it becomes clearer if we think of commuting expenses in terms of the whole journey or comparing modes by

[18] One pound is approximately 53 Baht.

distances. For example, a commuter can take the bus directly from the nearest stop to their home (which means they pay 3.50 to 20 baht depending on the time). Nevertheless, commuters have to take paratransit modes, such as motorcycle taxi, Bunker truck or buses from their home to the nearest BTS station. This is because rail mass transit services are limited to some areas in the city. Commuters' travelling expenses will not only be BTS fare, but the paratransit is also fare too, which will cost the traveller almost a hundred baht. In this regard, using rail mass transit is more expensive than any other type of public transportation in the city. Moreover, across the same travelling distances rail mass transit alone can cost 55 baht while buses only 5 baht; over ten times the difference, particularly for the poor who earn a minimum weight a day of around 315 baht. Despite the government and its agencies aware of the effects of the pricing regime, they have chosen to leave it this way.

> We need to understand that the middle class is a class that doesn't like inconvenience and they most likely would not want to share services with the poor. If we lower the rail mass transit price, the poor will come to use the rail mass transit. Once the poor use rail mass transit, the middle class will go back to using private cars. Then, the rail mass transit won't be able to solve traffic problems in Bangkok. What we need to do is to keep increasing the numbers of middle class passengers using rail mass transit and keeping them away from the streets. Ticket prices are one way of controlling this.
> Scholar 08, Head of Rail Transport Group, Ministry of Transport.

As can be seen from the above quote, the main reason for keeping BTS tickets expensive is to ensure that the middle classes remain loyal mass transit users amidst an assumption that the middle classes are not willing to share public services, such as the BTS, with the poor. Equally revealing is the assumption of policy makers that if they solve the middle class commuting concerns then there will be considerable relief to the city's traffic problems. Besides the issue of pricing demonstrating the exclusivity of the BTS to cater to the middle classes, the policy for more Park & Ride (P&R) schemes reinforces this perspective. That is, P&R schemes were expected to motivate middle class automobile users to include the BTS in their daily commuting patterns. In fact, "the rail mass rapid transit system remained strongly biased towards the mobility and accessibility

of the urban middle class" (Charoentrakulpeeti et al. 2006: 707); the system lacks connections, such as other public transportations hubs; coach stations, bus terminals or bus stops. As Bangkok is full of *soi* or *trok* (small streets), travelling from home to transport hubs requires either private or paratransit vehicles. It became apparent that the early P&R schemes at certain stations at the end of service lines were helping to reduce usage of some *troks*, because commuter journeys by road were shortened. As a result, and with pressure from BTS customers, P&R schemes were rolled out on a much more extensive basis.

> We carried out a survey of our customers. The results showed that many customers wanted us to have more P&R schemes. To be honest, it was very difficult to find land to build car parks near to BTS stations in the city centre However, we have tried our best to serve our customers and give them the most convenience.
> Scholar 20, Executive Director of the BTS Group Holding Co. Ltd.

> According to our survey, it's very clear that we needed P&R to stimulate middle class passengers. In a Western city, P&R is provided outside the town, mostly at the end of rail mass transit lines. In Bangkok, we needed another model. Our city has been formed into superblocks.[19] Walking conditions from home to the BTS station are inconvenient. Those who live more than a 300 metre radius away from BTS stations, owing to the weather conditions, are forced to take other mode of transports to deliver them to BTS stations. What we are doing now is planning to increase P&R both for the new construction lines and the existing ones.
> Scholar 08, Head of Rail Transport Group, Ministry of Transport.

Politicians and policy makers appear to be in accord in believing that increasing parking is a sound strategy for improving access to mass rapid transit, although this perspective has not been based on any form of cost-benefit analysis or sustainability assessment (Townsend and Zacharias 2010: 321). In sum, the P&R schemes support car users, namely, the middle and upper classes, and although they do not deter the poor from using the BTS, they give the impression that it is the middle classes who are being wooed into using the

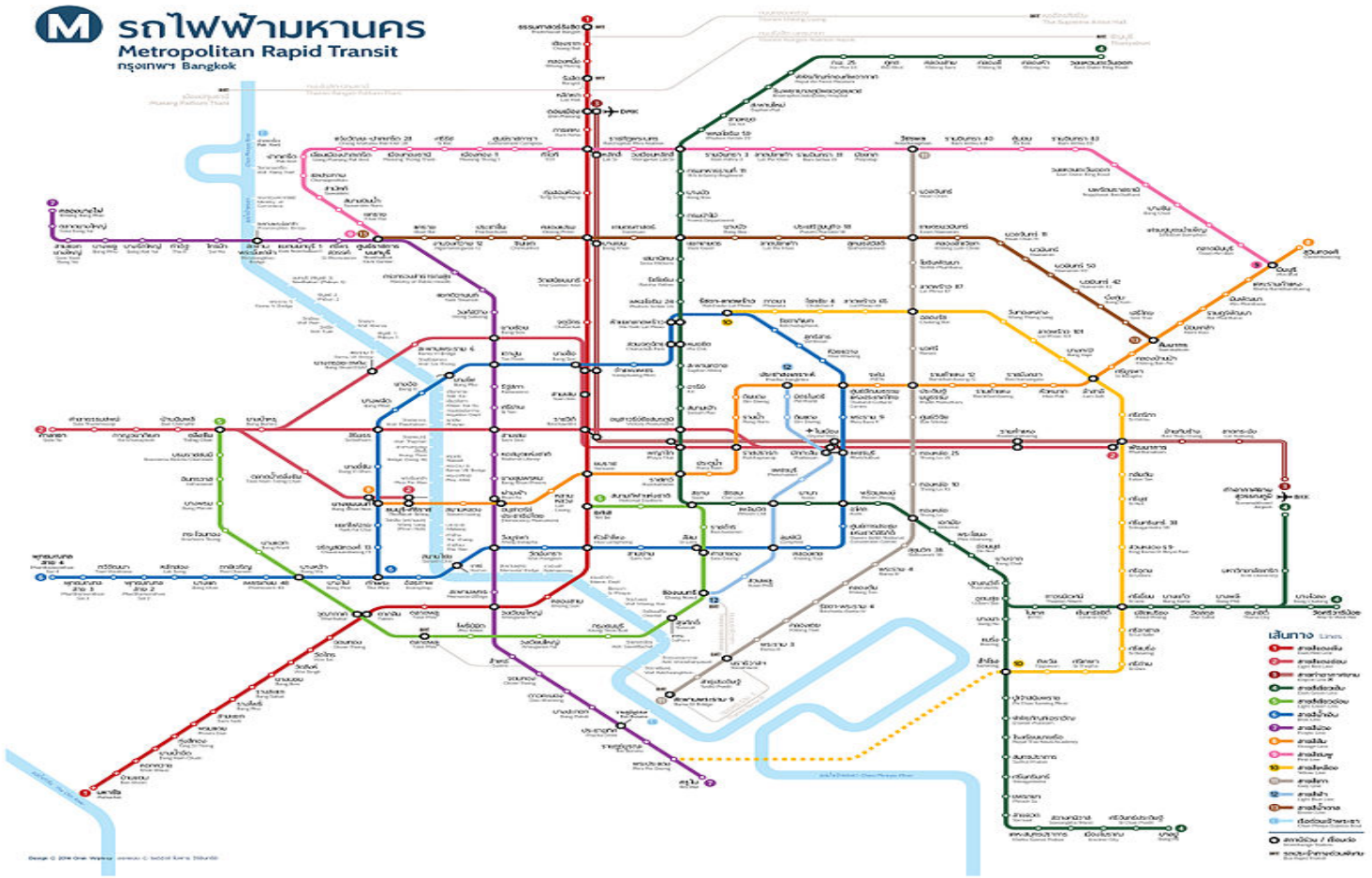
[19] A superblock is a city block that is larger than usual, which is usually surrounded by main roads and contains small roads inside.

system. Consequently, the SkyTrain has been re-imagined, primarily as a middle-class mode of transport.

Given this situation, politicians began to support the extension of the BTS to gain middle class votes and this became one of the key issues of the 2011 election campaign. The two main political parties, the Democrats and Pheu Thai, both supported the idea of BTS extensions to gain the confidence of Bangkok's middle classes to consolidate their power. Prior to the election, the Pheu Thai Party was mostly perceived as a party with little concern about the middle classes, hence the party functionaries made a conscious decision to use their promotion of BTS extensions as a means of improving their relationship with the middle classes. On the other hand, the Democrat party realised the need to safeguard its middle class support base to win the election. Consequently, both sides of the political spectrum's campaigns included support for rail mass transit extension projects. Figure 6 - 3 shows the details of the master plan for the rail mass transit system (URMAP) from the 1990s, which both of the two main political parties supported. In fact, Yingluck Shinawatra, the leader of Pheu Thai Party, went a step further and promised that the plan would be completed by 2016. The total length of the ten proposed extension lines was 252 kilometres, which would cover most of the BMR area, and would comprise both elevated and underground systems, against an existing length of 79.45 Km.[20] After Yingluck took office as prime minister, her government kept their promise by pushing ahead with the rail mass transit extension projects with haste to show Bangkok citizens that this was not just an empty electoral campaign promise.

[20] This was the rail mass transit length in 2011.

Figure 6-3: Current Rail Mass Transit Master Plan for BMR



Source: Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand (n.d.)

This master plan for rail mass transit (Figure 6-3) was proposed by the Thai cabinet and on 24 August 2011. The government announced in a policy statement to the National Assembly that the construction of all ten mass transit lines would proceed and would be completed within 4 years as promised in Yingluck's campaign.

However, Yingluck's government was not able to successfully delivere rail mass transit services as promised. There was a delay during her government. In 2014 before she was defeated by the military government, rail mass transit has only completed one line of extension; the green lineeast ward to Barring Station, while the purple line was still under construction. As the Thai government viewed the necessity of the SkyTrain and the demand of rail mass transit users, the plan on URMAP continue to process. The purple line has already operated, while the orange, red, blue and yellow have already been approved, and some have already started. Arguably, politics has been strongly in support of mass transit development.

6.4 A fractured mobility

So far what we have seen is a policy perspective that pushed for a rethink of the BTS as a city-wide inclusive traffic and transportation solution, towards a middle-class idea, a reframing that they nevertheless insisted would help in resolving the city's congestion to a large extent by keeping the middle classes and their cars off the road. While there is some statistical evidence to indicate that the government has managed to sustain the middle class usage of the BTS, we need a clearer understanding of what the middle class themselves think of the BTS and how they perceive it as an everyday transport option.

6.4.1 'Politics' of Middle Class Scepticism

As it has emerged from previous chapters, often middle class responses to specific development programmes are influenced by the broader political context within which such schemes work. Also, if the middle classes are often seen raising their eyebrows every time a mega-infrastructure project is

announced, it is not so much to do with their reservations about the project itself, but from prior experiences where a multitude of government agencies muddle through its implementation with inordinate delays and unsubstantiated cost overruns. In the 8th NESDP (1997-2001), it was proposed that more than 650 billion THB (approximately 13 billion GBP) would be spent on over 150 projects for transportation, but only 15% of this public investment eventually became a reality (TDRI, 2001). This statistic gives hard evidence of how slow such developments are, and how what the state announces is rarely reflected in reality. The rail mass transit system was no exception to this. The first three lines originally approved were the Green, Blue and Red lines. It took around 10 years to complete the elevated BTS Green Line, and 8 years to complete the Blue Line. Construction of both lines suffered long delays and the Red Line was shelved (Kamanamool 2004).

Amidst this context, residents of Bangyai and Bangna were asked to reflect on the impact of the BTS on their everyday commuting patterns. While broadly it became apparent that the lower and upper middle classes revealed different (and often contrasting) perspectives, the more striking fact is that such distinctions were shaped as much by their larger political inclinations as by the practicalities of their quotidian travel demands. Even though there are other forms of mass rapid transit systems in the city such as the MRT, they do not cover the fieldwork research neighbourhoods of Bangna and Bangyai and hence the focus remains solely on the BTS. There is a broad scepticism amongst all middle class residents around the impossibility of realising such schemes given the instability of the Thai government (and a resulting inconsistency in the Thai cabinet), as well as the state of corruption in the country. It is this foundational nature of Thai politics that makes the middle classes question whether mega-infrastructure projects such as the BTS can be delivered on time, within the budget, and inclusively solve the city's traffic challenges. It has already been mentioned that since the democratic revolution in 1932, Thailand has had 12 successful military coups and several failed cases. The first democratic election was held in 1933, but there has been a history of electoral fraud and corruption. Moreover, even when a government is elected, cabinet reshuffles are very

frequent. The instability of the Thai government has resulted in many projects failing to come to fruition (see page 209). Moreover, the middle classes consider that Thai politicians are inherently corrupt, with many believing that they manage development policies for their own good, as discussed earlier in Chapter 5. This is a conviction strongly held by Bangna residents whose distrust of the Thai government means that they are suspicious of project proposals usually have hidden agendas for politicians to make money or gain political power rather than benefit society as a whole. For example, some residents are convinced that the construction of certain BTS lines were given priority over others purely for politicians' own benefits.

> They approved the line that they can benefit from. They will buy land along the new rail mass transit construction before we (citizens) know, so they can buy land at a low price. After that they will sell at a high price when the rail mass transit comes.
> BN1109.

> Rail mass transit is a mega–project that consumes lots of money. They can gain a lot from this project, so I think every cabinet member will definitely approve this mass transit development. As you can see, they approve very short routes of the project at nearly every cabinet meeting. Why don't they do it all at once? Because they want to gain the proceeds of corruption bit by bit.
> BN1201.

Mega projects are viewed as important political perks to be doled out during election campaigning (Siemiatycki 2006) and hence are likely to only appear on paper; in the past there has been little follow-up after the elections. The extension of the BTS was proposed in the 2011 national election manifesto by both parties, but most Bangna residents asserted that this was only promoted by the politicians to show that they cared about Bangkok and thus, get the support of the electorate.

> I would be very happy if the government can successfully deliver rail mass transit projects to Bangkok. I don't believe that they will be able to do it since this is not the first time that an election candidate has put BTS into their election campaign. It's their dream. We took over four to five decades to have only two short rail mass transit lines. Now they said they will construct ten lines in 4-5 years. It's a joke!!!
> BN1105.

Given the established animosity of the upper middle classes to the Pheu Thai Party, it is not surprising that Bangna residents drawn from this elite social group saw any political announcements about the BTS as an electoral ploy to gain a crucial vote bank. They were also sceptical as to whether the party would carry through with their promise once elected.

The contrasting political positions within the middle classes was reaffirmed by the responses of Bangyai residents who did not see the rail mass transit projects in the 2011 campaign as an empty promise. Although, like Banga residents, they too thought that most of the Thai government was corrupt and that political instability had been the cause of delays in development projects; nonetheless, they believed in the Pheu Thai Party (a reincarnation of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party). In 2006 when Thaksin was exceeded by the Thai military coup, Thai Rak Thai Party was dissolved by the Constitutional Court. Therefore, Thaksin and his allies created a new political party, Phue Thai Party for the 2011 national election, employing Thaksin's younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatara, a party leader. In this regard, those who believe in Thaksin Shinawatra and support Thai Ruk Thai Party seemed to believe that Phue Thai party would be able to successfully deliver rail mass transit extensions to Bangkok.

> I believe that the Pheu Thai campaign on rail mass transit is for real. It is not only for the election campaign. Don't you remember what they did in their last government? They are the best government who can introduce great development to Bangkok. They finished constructing the new international airport that no other government could.
> BY1214.

This thesis seeks a more careful exploration of the politics of the Bangkok middle class, especially in the post-democracy era; resisting broad generalisations about their royalist-nationalist hegemonic tendencies. It is empirically substantiated through this chapter that the heterogeneity of the middle classes precludes a common political agenda, and thus it comes as no surprise that the lower middle class residents in Bangyai would actually throw their support behind Thaksin Shinawatra and the different groups attached to his mandate.

This contrast is further reinforced when we probe further into middle-class contempt for the government agencies and their working processes, as several departments muddle through transportation policies and projects, with little coordination. In fact, there are nine government authorities responsible for transportation issues and the rail mass transit programme comes under at least four different government agencies, with each having their own policies and data analysis. There is little communication amongst these different groups (Bowen 2006; Bae and Suthiranart 2003) with little security offered in the project implementation (Daniere 1995). Sometimes there are overlapping constructions in one area, and none in other places. Few officials have backgrounds in transportation planning and the consequence has been inadequate service provision (Bae and Suthiranart 2003). Most Bangna residents agreed that the government agencies lacked coordination and they were incapable of solving the problems involved of mega-project development.

> As we know, there are several agencies taking care of rail mass transit projects on their own. I think it's crazy they are not coordinated. Can you see the problems that have occurred? Poor junctions between the SkyTrain and underground systems as they come from different agencies. Even the tickets for the two systems are not compatible.
> BN1203.

> We (Bangkok) have a good plan for the rail mass transit system but we have bad agencies taking care of it. So our rail mass transit systems have remained on paper for decades. Lack of good cooperation among government agencies brought about delay of the projects. Each agency is trying to deal with rail mass transit projects, so they obstruct each other like what the government and Bangkok administration have done in delaying the Green Line construction to the other side of the Chao Phraya River; the extension that goes across the Chao Phrarya River connecting Sathorn and Wongwian Yai. What a silly situation.
> BN1116.

Thus, for most Bangna residents, Bangkok's traffic problems cannot be faulted for the lack of trying, but more due to a persistent State inability to establish effective cooperation around a master plan to provide a comprehensive strategy for transportation (Du Pont and Egan 1997).

By now, it is not surprising to find that Bangyai residents were more sympathetic towards the government as they argued that the rapid growth of a city like Bangkok would leave any government incapable of providing adequate infrastructure. Here, they felt that it would be unfair to blame only governmental processes for the delays in construction as they pointed out that it was often environmental protections and complexities from having to manage the local political situation that are also key factors that have led to these delays.

> I was working as a planner. I know how complicated it is for one project to be put into action. NGO groups and the locals can delay project-working processes. Once these groups protest, we have to spend time negotiating with them and the project might have to be halted until the negotiation has been done. When it is approved, the project will run smoothly.
> BY1201.

> I think we should show our enthusiasm for those civil servants working on these development projects. There is a lot to get done such as dealing with the locals, dealing with NGOs, dealing with politicians, and dealing with budgets. All of these are complicated and take time. You can't get it done in just one click.
> BY1205.

There is an aspect here of Bangyai residents doubling up as state allies through their role as civil servants (many hold jobs in the public sector), and hence their commitment to the state needs to be seen from this light. In a sense, they are 'insiders', which explains why, despite acknowledging the lack of coordination and the government's complicity in delays to infrastructure projects, they continue to maintain that the state is best suited in terms of making decisions around transportation and other urban planning policies for the city. What they are doing here is basically reposing their faith in their fellow civil servants working on this project, and whose role they endorse as the expert.

6.4.2 Who Benefits Finally?

As explained in the previous section, two main policies were launched by policy makers as they strove to transform the BTS into a middle class mode of travel choice, which raises the question as to whether they have been unequivocally welcomed by Bangkok's middle classes. Using Boschken's (1998) argument regarding the systemic power of the upper middle classes as a starting point, during fieldwork, residents of Bangna and Bangyai were asked what they thought about these middle class-specific policies, protecting the BTS fares and providing P&R schemes at stations. The irony here is that it is Bangna residents who as sceptics benefit the most from BTS, while Bangyai residents support it on paper as a mega infrastructure but have been finding it difficult to actually access it as an everyday mode. It thus would seem simplistic to present the BTS as a bourgeois infrastructure as it does not serve all sub-groups within the Bangkok middle classes equally. This means that we need to be more careful about assessing specific government policies to protect the BTS as a middle class travel choice, especially their decision to keep the ticket prices high and introduce P&R schemes. In deciding to keep the BTS ticket prices high, policy makers have attracted the support of Bangna residents for once, as they believe that reduced ticket prices lead to a lower quality of BTS services such that they would be overcrowded, dirty and unreliable.

> I know that the price might be too expensive for lower income groups. However, we need to pay more for more benefits. For example, the BTS is punctual, fast and safe. These are benefits of the BTS that you cannot find on the buses. The buses have fewer benefits, so their fares are cheap. Rail mass transit has more benefits, and so it should be more expensive.
> BN1309.

> I like to use the BTS. However, I might stop using it if it is no longer convenient. I heard a rumour that the government is going to lower the ticket price to a flat rate of 20 baht for travelling across the whole system. If that happens, many people will use it. I will not go squeezing in the crowd with those people.
> BN1319.

The notion that there is a premium to be paid for a 'good service' is something echoed by almost all Bangna residents, who sought to safeguard its quality through an exclusionary pricing policy, that they largely did not repent.

Residents in Bangyai however did not share this argument as they maintained that the government needed to lower BTS fares to ensure its accessibility by a wider set of social groups. Their resonating standpoint was that the BTS is not only a public transport but a 'mass transport' and should be made available for anyone desiring to use it.

> BTS ticket fares are too expensive for the majority of Bangkok citizens. Since the BTS is mass transportation, it should be available for everyone to use. I believe it is the government's duty to subsidise mass transit fares. It is not fair to other Bangkok citizens to be excluded from this mode of transportation.
> BY1301.

Frequently, during interviews, Bangyai residents expressed concerns about their transportation expenses, even though they clarified that this did not deter them from using the BTS. Even though there might be an altruistic note when Bangyai residents insist that the BTS is a mass transportation choice, one cannot help wondering whether there is some vested form of self-interest in making a case for lowering fares, and if they would not really mind the overcrowding if

this were to happen. This is of course, hypothetical and a reminder for us to approach middle class discourses more critically as a vested self-interest group.

Similarly, Bangyai residents were not pleased about the proposed P&R schemes, as they expressed concerns about the amount of money they would have to pay, resulting in an increase in their travel costs.

> I need to pay for fuel, parking tickets and BTS tickets. It will be more expensive than driving straight to my destination.
> BY1307.

> I can see why the government introduced these schemes, but I think it is not appropriate. The government should help us save travelling costs by introducing other schemes such as BTS shuttle buses. This P&R scheme will only increase travelling as we have to pay extra for BTS tickets, which are not cheap.
> BY1309.

> I hope for other kinds of supporting policies. I would appreciate it if the government could provide us other types of transport to go to a BTS station. I don't want to drive to the station, as I think it will cost me more. If the government provides shuttle buses or improves the bus routes to connect with the BTS, that will be excellent.
> BY1208.

Here again, Bangyai residents emphasise on the 'public' nature of the BTS, as they argued that the government should not be encouraging residents to combine public and private modes of travel, indicating their preference for shuttle buses over P&R schemes. In a context where their neighbourhood is poorly serviced by the usual public choice of buses, mass rapid rail transit is their only option, one that they seem to have reluctantly embraced and yet seek to secure as an affordable mode of travel. This emerges in Putthilerpong (2009; Table 6-4) who studied the effects of the development of the Purple Line that directly links Nonthaburi, including the Bangyai district, to the rest of the BMR, and found that in the absence of any decent public transport modes and faced with long commuting hours, nearly 60 per cent of the residents use private cars as their preferred travel choice. Putthilerpong (2009) argued that the Purple Line directly affects the land-use development and migration of Bangkok citizens to Bangyai district; however, there is still lack of other public

transportation to connect commuters' houses to BTS stations. He suggested that the government should encourage high density or high-rise development along BTS lines and provide feeding public transport to make a convenient journey from home to a BTS station. In that case, the Purple Line will only motivate people to move to Bangyai, but even then, those people may still not use the BTS. Moreover, the purple will only bring about traffic congestion problems to the district if new residents are still car users.

Table 6-4: Commuting Pattern of Nonthaburi Participants

	Number (Persons)	Percentage
Using private car to destination	235	58.9
Using private car and public mode to destination	10	2.5
Using public land transportation mode to destination	111	27.8
Using public land transportation mode and public water transportation mode to destination	11	2.8
Using private car and rail mass transit to destination	7	1.8
Using private car and public water transportation mode to destination	3	0.8
Using private motorcycle to destination	19	4.8
Others	3	0.8
Total	399	100

Source: Putthilerpong (2009)

In fact, Bangyai residents were reluctant subscribers to the idea of multi-mode travel to get around the city as they believe that crucial time is lost during these transfers and as people from the lower middle classes, they often have the longest daily commute, one that they would like to reduce rather than increase.

However, policy makers appear to have satisfied the upper middle class Bangna residents. To start with, they reported that the P&R schemes have helped them to more conveniently access the BTS, shortening travel times. Money issues do not seem to be first priority for them, for they value the time saved and convenience of getting a car parking space. In contrast with most Bangyai residents, the majority of Bangna residents asserted that the P&R schemes actually reduced their travelling expenses.

> I wish there were more parking spaces at Bangna stations. I find it is very convenient parking my car and getting on the BTS to Bangkok's centre. Instead of paying for expressway tickets, I pay for BTS tickets, which is about the same amount as the expressway fee. Then I can save fuel expenses since I don't get stuck in traffic for hours and my driving distance is shorter.
> BN1202.

What emerges from these discussions with the Bangkok middle classes is that while the government might be keen to peddle the BTS as an infrastructure solution aimed at the middle classes, the latter are not eager recipients. At one level, the inherent heterogeneity of the middle classes does not ensure unilateral support as illustrated by the fracturing of support between the upper and lower middle classes. At another level, the broader political subscriptions of the two groups also greatly influences the way these projects are perceived and often supported on paper, but change their opinions when confronted with shifting realities on the ground.

6.4.3 BTS as a lifestyle choice

Having disaggregated the middle classes and their reactions to the transformation of a mega-infrastructure project such as the BTS into an everyday infrastructure, there is a need to take a wider view and assess the geography of the BTS as it creates new landscapes of consumption and exasperates tensions, not only between the middle classes and the poor, but also within the middle classes. First of all, it needs to be noted that existing stations and routes of the BTS are mainly located in and around the upper middle class activity areas, servicing mostly CBD, business districts and high-income residential zones (Bengtsson 2006) where the upper middle class and upper classes tend to be present. Hence, these groups are well connected with the CBD and the other main business centres, while the underground system links just one of the middle class residential zones to the business districts of Bangkok. The underground system is linked to the CBD by the BTS. There is a general impression that the rail mass transit system serves businesses, commerce and the tourist industry, and not to transport ordinary commuters from their residential areas into the city (Bengtsson 2006; Bae and Suthiranart

2003). As the location of stations and routes meet the demands of most Bangna residents, but not those of Bangyai, the latter do not use the service as much. The inconvenience of the network is the main reason why many people have not been using the rail mass transit system (Bray and Sayeng 2002). More specifically, Bangyai resident find the rail mass transit inconvenient for them as the stations are at some distance and in most cases they do not go to their desired destination.

> I barely use the rail mass transit systems, as routes don't go to my destination. I would love to use the rail mass transit system to go to work but I can't. The rail mass transit lines are only going into town. I have no activities to do down there, so I don't have to use it.
> BY1309.

> The BTS is not my daily transportation mode because it is inconvenient for me. I am working at a law firm on Kaseart-Nawamin road, which has no BTS service. The nearest station to my workplace is Chatujak, which is one of the busiest areas in Bangkok. It could take me hours from the ChatujakStation to my office by taking taxi or bus. It is way much better to drive straight from home to my office.
> BY1215.

For Bangna residents, their destination is invariably the CBD and hence, the BTS proves ideal in terms of taking them from point to point (home to work), and a better alternative to driving, unlike Bangyai residents who repeatedly mentioned that it would be more effective in terms of time and money to drive than take the BTS.

> I work in Silom. Can you image driving in and out of Silom during rush hour? It's a tragedy. Since the SkyTrain opened, I have been one of their loyal customers. The SkyTrain is my daily infrastructure to go to work. Even during weekends, I often use the BTS if I go in town such as going shopping at Siam Paragon or Central World.
> BN1305.

> I use the BTS for work every weekday. My office is in the Interchange Building at the Asoke Junction. I believe you can imagine how horrible the traffic of Asoke Junction is during rush hour. It can take you hours. If I drive to work, I have to leave home around 6.00-6.30am. With the BTS, I can leave home around 8.00am. I have more time to rest. With the BTS, I can avoid 2 – 3 hours on the road on the way home. This is why I no longer drive to work.
> BN1307.

These are contradictory narratives where the claims of one section of the middle classes is in direct contradiction to another sub-group. A simple explanation is the geography of the BTS itself as it serves a select few through its location and connections while it teases another section from a more remote distance. For this group, the visible presence of the BTS within the city's urbanscape hints at an alternative public mode of travel, but one that is inconvenient and not viable (at least in its current spread).

Corridors of Consumption

Another aspect of the BTS that exasperates the tensions between the upper and lower middle classes is the way it has triggered the development of niche consumption corridors along its routes within the city. As seen in other places such as the Delhi Metro, private developers joined the fray as development of the BTS kick-started, introducing property-led developments, including high-rise housing, shopping malls and other leisure activities with convenient accessibility to BTS stations, thus demonstrating how the SkyTrain system acted as a catalyst for such developments. In Delhi, planners used the Delhi Metro to reorganise the urban landscape and stimulate property development (Siemiatycki 2006), which appears to have been the case with Bangkok's SkyTrain (BTS) as well. The BTS in fact proved to be a key catalyst in bringing real-estate developments back to the city in the post-1997 financial crisis period (Bray and Sayeng 2002). However, as Jenks (2003) has already noted, these changes in cityscape development have led to land-use segregation, whereby the geography of the city had been divided into two worlds: above and below. The world above consists of clean shopping arcades, luxurious five star hotels and amenities that serve the 'haves', and by contrast, below there is a congested

world of dirty hot street markets and poor quality infrastructure inhabited by the 'have nots' (Jenks 2003). That is, the new corridors of consumption only serve certain elite Bangkok groups. In these zones served by the SkyTrain, there is interconnected international consumption, linking those who use them, to the global community (Jenks 2004).

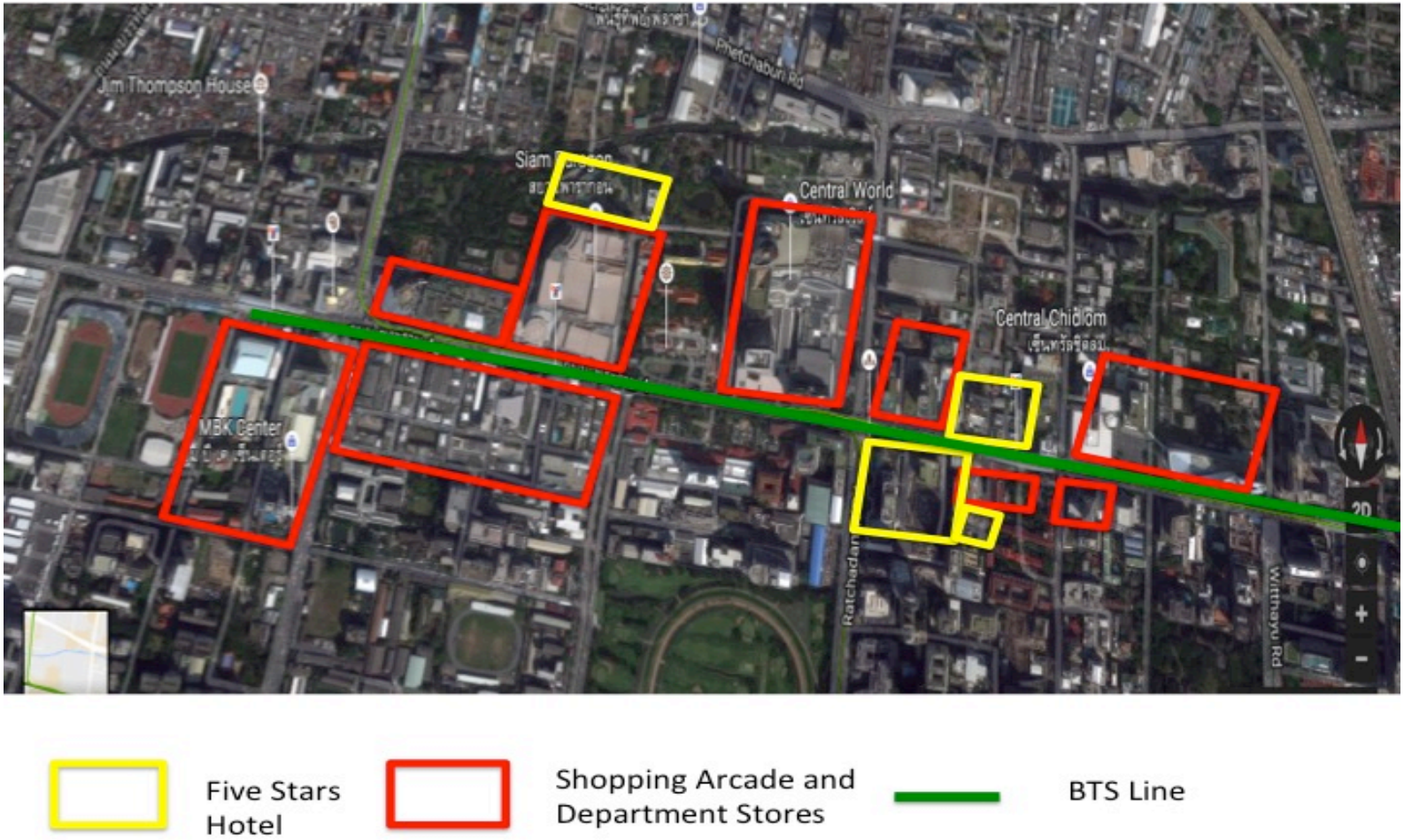
Figure 6-4: Skywalk connecting Chidlom BTS station with National Stadium Station giving direct access to local amenities

Source: The researcher (15 August 2013)

The two main consumption corridors centred on shopping arcades in Bangkok are between the Chidlom and National Stadium Stations (Figure 6 – 5) and between the Prompong and Asoke Stations (Figure 6 – 6). These corridors are also connected via a skywalk (Figure 6-4). The skywalk allows people to walk under BTS lines connecting stations via a walkway. Although there are fewer international brand shops and hotels in the latter when compared with the former, this corridor acts more as a hub connecting locals and international people. Asoke is also where the MRT underground connects with the BTS. However, the connection is not seamless and the connecting route is lined with,

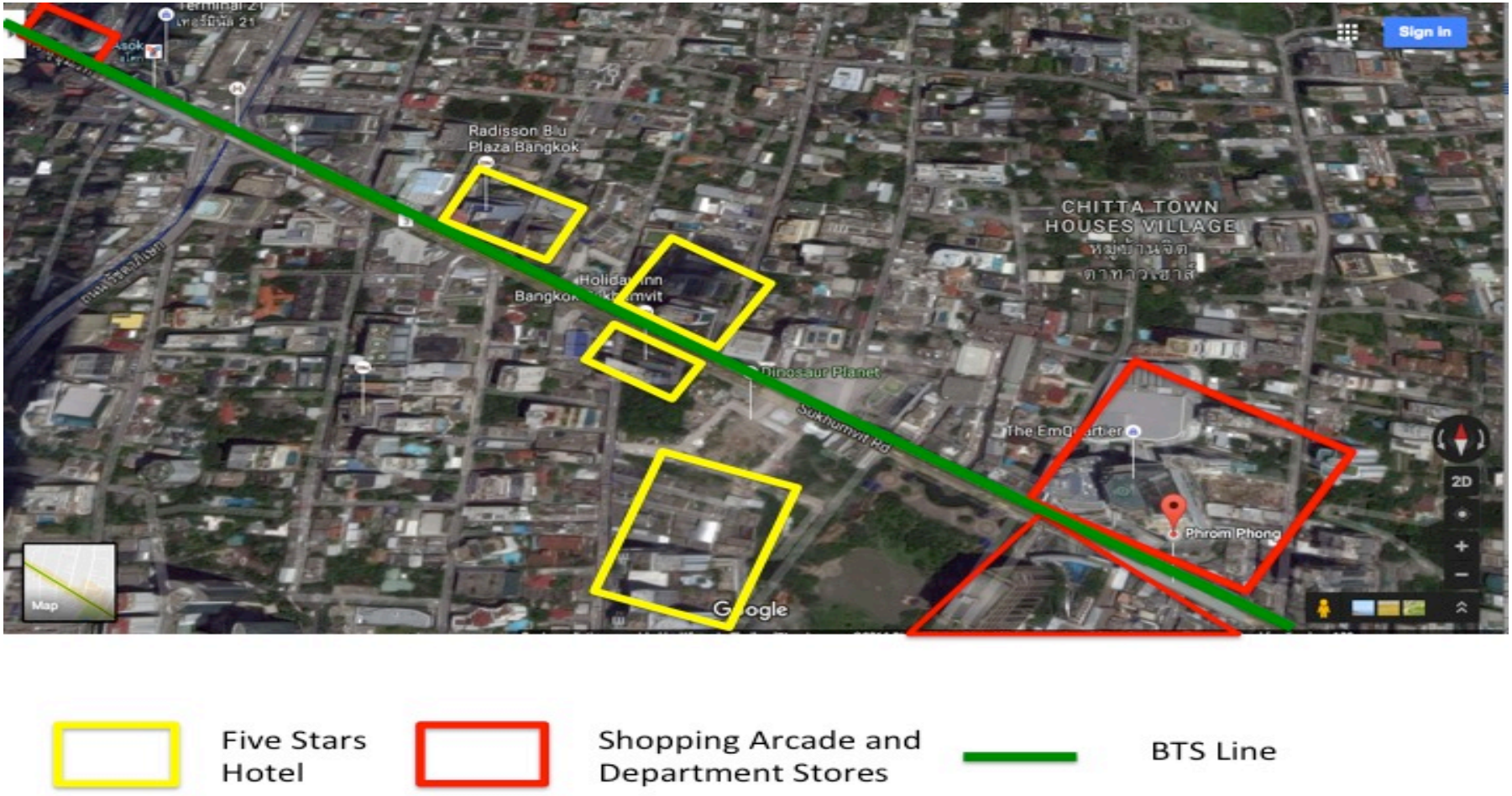
not only offices where the middle classes work, but also multi-purpose buildings containing sport clubs, cinemas and shopping arcades. There is a third corridor can be found between Saladang and Chong Nonsri stations at the heart of the CBD on Silom Road.

Figure 6-5: Chidlom Station and National Stadium Station Consumption Corridor Current Rail Mass Transit Master Plan for BMR



Source: Google Map (10 October 2016)

Figure 6-6: Prompong and Asoke Stations Consumption Corridor



Source: Google Map (10 October 2016

As a result of these consumption corridors, the BTS has come to be associated with hyper-shopping experiences in the centre of Bangkok (Isarangkun na Ayuthaya 2005) in the form of such described corridors that provide concentrated access to a range of facilities. Those who can afford to take advantage of this new cityscape have relocated their daily activities, such as shopping and leisure, and in some cases have moved closer to these consumption corridors and the BTS (Richardson and Jensen 2008). However, such opportunities do not seem to be available to Bangyai residents. They have not been seen to take advantage of the new corridors of consumption because shopping is too expensive and these areas are too busy.

> I have been there once. My kids wanted to go and experience the skywalk and its shopping loops. They sell expensive goods, which we don't want to buy. Moreover, it is too crowded. I am not used to it. If my kids didn't ask me to go, I would not go there.
> BY1217.

> It's too far and too troublesome to travel there. I don't have anything to do there. I can go shopping at the department stores around here. That is enough for me. Those places are not for me. They sell brand name goods. It's for tourists and those upper classes.
> BY1204.

Thus, although the rail mass transit has established a new relationship between travel, consumption and vertical space in the urban areas (Richardson and Jensen 2008), this has only been taken advantage of by the upper segment of the middle classes, those real purchasing power. The BTS, in this context, has also stimulated new types of residential development, comprising high-rise luxury condominiums located close to the stations, thereby accentuating the notion of a vertically divided city (Hoskin 2000; Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya 2005; Jenks 2003; Kongsomsuksiri 2006). Figure 6-7 shows vertical development in the vicinity of the rail mass transit line stations.

These high-rise condominiums are targeted at the elite sections of Bangkok society, ones who are willing to pay their expensive prices, in lieu of saving commuter travel time as well as avoid the stress of traffic congestions

(Sirikolkarn 2008). Besides being convenient and helping them save on fuel costs, a vertical lifestyle next to the SkyTrain has become something to which many aspire, with the aim of owning a luxury condominium in a desirable area (Bengtsson 2006). Some well – off Bangna residents have bought second homes near a BTS station to stay at during weekdays so as to gain easier access to the corridors of consumption.

> We have just bought a new condominium next to On Nut Station. It is a just simple move to stay next to a BTS station. It's one of the easiest ways. I paid for the condominium, which is worthwhile, as it saves other expenses, such as fuel, tollway tickets and parking tickets. It even saves me money from having to buy a car for my children.
> BN1305.

> Things have changed. The traffic is so bad we need to find another way to give us the most comfortable lives. I bought a condominium next to Chong-Nonsri station. Our family stays there during weekdays. My kids take the rail mass transit to study. They have no longer to wake up very early in the morning anymore. During weekends, we usually stay at home in the Bangna area. I think this is a new way of life for Bangkokians. We need two homes, weekend and weekdays, for the best quality of life.
> BN1206.

Figure 6-7: Intense vertical development along the rail mass transit routes

Source: The Researcher (15 August 2013)

Although some Bangna middle class appear to think that the above type of arrangement is common for the Bangkok middle classes, for most members of the middle classes, such as those living in Bangyai, this is unaffordable. Moreover, in those parts of the Bangyai area where the BTS is accessible, real-estate development has priced local residents out of the market. For example, the Purple Line running through Bangyai has encouraged property developers to construct buildings, condominiums and department stores to attract better-off citizens (Putthilerpong 2009) triggering what could possibly be local forms of gentrification. Hyun Bang Shin and Soo-Hyun Kim (2016: 555), studied gentrification in Seoul, and asserted that the emergence of Seoul's gentrification could be regarded as an endogenous process, embedded in Korea's construction of speculative urban development. Seoul's gentrification has been a process of socio-spatial restructuring at a municipal scale (ibid.: 555). This means that the entire neighborhood of Bangyai may move forward to demolish the old neighborhood for a new form of housing to support well-off middle classes as the population demands. However, this idea contested the idea of gentrification expanding from city centre to peripheral areas (Atkinson and Bridge 2005). Gentrification seems to be overwhelmed by the private developers. It becomes the source of a redevelopment association being influenced by outsiders' interests rather than those of local residents (Shin and Kim 2016: 553). These outsiders are attracted by mega-infrastructure developments that make the area become attractive to well-off middle classes in other parts of the city.

Table 6-5: Statistics of newly constructed homes in 2007 and 2009 in Nonthaburi Province

	2007 (Prior to Purple Line approval for construction)	**2009 (after Purple Line approval for construction)**
Single House	7,110	201,043
Semi-Detached and Detached house	3,382	174,079
Condominium	1,739	6,402

Source: National Statistics Office of Thailand (n.d.)

The influence of the BTS can be seen from increasing numbers of properties constructed in Nonthaburi Province, which includes the Bangyai District (see Table 6-5). As can be seen, this tripled between 2007 and 2009 after the approval for the construction of the Purple Line.

Although the SkyTrain brings the new typology of vertical lifestyle to the area, many of the incumbent residents do not seem to be desirous of it. Some of Bangyai residents prefer to retain the traditional way of living in their neighbourhood, near relatives and long-term friends. Moreover, they consider that real estate development, whilst bringing urbanisation, has also brought negative impacts, such as noise, water pollution and air pollution. Development encouraged by the BTS affects the locals' living environment.

> The condominiums along the rail mass transit lines are expensive. Have you seen the price of those apartments? They cost millions. I don't think it's worth it to stay there. I prefer to live on my own land. Maybe those condominiums are for the new generation.
> BY1216.

> I am glad that the BTS brings urban development to our neighbourhoods, but I still prefer to live in our peaceful neighbourhood that still has orchards. I hope this environment will not be concretised over. I don't like luxury vertical living. I feel like I live in the air. It might look luxury to some people, but you own nothing but a small square metre of boxes in those buildings. How can it be more valuable than living on the ground, living in the house with garden.
> BY1205.

While at policy level, the BTS was presented as a travel alternative to the city's middle classes, its inherent heterogeneity does not allow it to unreservedly embrace this mega-infrastructure project. This is seen in the differing arguments presented by upper and lower middle class residents in favour of, and against the BTS. The SkyTrain's subsequent development as a corridor of consumption, triggering high-end urban developments around the stations, has further divided the upper *and* lower middle classes, but also suggests ongoing tensions between the old and the new middle classes.

6.5 Conclusion

Bangkok's historic trajectory of urbanisation has essentially been one of replacing its canals and rivers as the prominent transportation mode with a deliberate plan of building roads since the late 19th century. It was these roads that acted as a catalyst for Bangkok's modernisation and ironically also served as the source of its subsequent urban planning problems, particularly around traffic and transportation. While there has been no dearth of solutions proposed, a common running theme amongst all was the need to take the commuters using the private car as the predominant mode of travel off the road through incentivised schemes around the building of mass rapid rail systems within the city. Introduced at the drawing board stage as mega-infrastructure projects, schemes such as the SkyTrain or the BTS have become mainstay symbols of central government effort to take commuters away from using the road networks. Even though their economic rationale is still suspect, the government has embraced the SkyTrain as a viable public transport option within the city despite contradictions embedded within its realisation. This has mainly involved a radical shift in its imagination as a city-wide transportation solution inclusive of all social classes, to a predominantly middle class alternative. As policies are introduced to make the SkyTrain attractive to the city's middle classes, interviews with residents on the ground show that such a strategy might be premature as the inherent heterogeneity of the middle classes means that such development projects are not unequivocally embraced by them. Thus, upper and lower middle class residents in the neighbourhoods of Bangna and Bangyai reveal different perceptions and expectations of the BTS, one that is complicated by their broader political viewpoints, resulting in a fractured middle class loyalty as far as such schemes are concerned. At another level, the development of station areas around the BTS as landscapes and corridors of consumption has meant that only the elite members of the middle class can access this new consumer-driven landscape, leaving large sections of the middle classes susceptible to the localised forces of gentrification.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

In a passionate investigation by lawyer-journalist Bruch Rich of how the institutional dynamics of the World Bank has essentially led to *Mortgaging the Earth* (1994), the book's first chapter is evocatively titled *The dwelling place of the angels*, and begins at a specific time and place, The World Bank's 1991 annual meeting of the Board of Governors held in Bangkok from 15 – 17 October. Following an army coup in February 1991, the Thai government that had been installed took on an authoritarian role, going all out to ensure the city's readiness for this important event. A conference centre costing more than $100 million was built in less than two years in one of the new, rapidly growing parts of the city, Sukumvit Road, also one of the most congested. In order to resolve the traffic problem, at least temporarily, the government took drastic measures such as announcing 14 and 15 October as special national holidays in Bangkok, and indulged in violent acts of cleaning up the city, getting rid of vendors, hawkers, and prostitutes. With slums dotting three sides of the conference centre, proposals were made to relocate them to alternative sites. In a controversial move, a compromise was stuck where it was agreed that while two slums would have to willingly relocate, three others could remain, subject to their participation in a beautification programme to plant trees and grass, and improve the appearance of their dwellings.

Across town, at Chulalongkorn University, quite a few gathered in a 'People's Forum'. Organised by more than 200 Thai NGOs, this was intended to provide an alternative platform, bringing together the voices of those who were not allowed into the 'dwelling place of the angels'. This was all because the country favoured a particular form of economic growth – export-led industrialization which had fostered Bangkok's phenomenal rise at the cost of the rural countryside, with Greater Bangkok's GDP in 1989 being three times that of Thailand (Sheng and Rahman 1995). As the city became a virtual playground for industrialization and real-estate speculation, it festered an intense divide between the rich and the poor, conditions that were exasperated under a dictatorial regime. On the penultimate day of the World Bank summit,

nearly 20,000 Thais peacefully marched, defying the warnings of the military, and used this momentous occasion to protest the eight-month old dictatorship and demand a return to democracy. Amidst all developmental concerns that the Summit brought out in the open, this seemed more important to them than rest else. Much hope was placed on the national election of 1992 to bring in an elected government but this was dashed when the military coup leader returned as the Prime Minister with the support of the winning coalition. This triggered massive unrest and public demonstrations in the city led by the former governor of Bangkok, Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, one that was countered with swift military action. As the confrontation turned into what is now known as the Bloody May massacre, peace was restored by the intervention of the King and new elections held in September 1992. Democratically elected governments managed a weak hold, with most struggling to last a full term. The 1997 Asian financial crisis triggered a major shift in Thai political history when Thakin Shinawatra's populist mandate won the 2001 national elections, on a promise of defying stringent neoliberal reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund. His regime was short-lived as well, overthrown by a military coup in 2006. By now, this thesis has established that there is no clear resolution to Thai's eternal political crisis, as the pendulum keeps swinging between democracy and dictatorship, and the country is held together by some semblance of stability via an enforced compromise that has come to be known as Thai-style democracy.

While Bangkok's urbanization continues to be written largely by its economic pursuits, national politics enacting out with the city as more than a prop has also had a huge bearing on how its residents embrace its growth and development agendas. This thesis has to a large extent explored this aspect of Bangkok's urbanization, looking at how the middle classes, as a particularly powerful socio-political class have allowed their political ideologies (or not) to inform and influence what they seek from the city, and how they envision shaping it. While the 1992 pro-democracy movement was initially portrayed, rather enthusiastically, as a middle-class movement, scholarship has come to contend this argument, instead showing how, amidst an ongoing political-

economic polarization between the rich and the poor, we are also witnessing an acute form of bifurcation within the middle classes – lower and upper middle classes. This clear split more or less resonates with the two political camps that have taken over Bangkok: the Red Shirts supporters of Thaksin (comprising rural voters and lower middle classes/working classes) and the Yellow Shirts in favour of the PAD (drawn from the upper middle classes and the royalist sympathisers).

What this thesis broadly found is that while the political loyalties of the two groups did have a clear influence in framing their expectations of Bangkok's urban development agenda, in line with the unpredictability of the middle classes, it also became apparent that the correlation isn't always so obvious. Thus, the upper middle class dismissal of a comprehensive urban planning process for the city came as a surprise especially when lower middle class residents reposed their faith in the same. Fieldwork investigations also revealed that their positions are often driven by everyday concerns, and their very practical gauging of short-term vs long-term options, and for such issues, their arguments and decisions are informed by utilitarian criteria rather than political ideology. This is indicative of the middle classes evolving from a 'class-in-itself' to a 'class-for-itself', and our too frequent condemnation of their rather narrow, vested, self-interests needs to be understood against this transition. It is in this context that this thesis recommends a more cautionary approach vis a vis literature that tend to present the middle classes either as true supporters of democracy or as outright enthusiasts of dictatorship. Instead, it follows Koo's (1991) more nuanced explanation and analysis that the constantly oscillating middle class support between democracy and dictatorship cannot be simply characterized as incoherent or inconsistent, and that their ambivalence towards both is driven in part by their internal heterogeneity and in part by the shifting political conjunctures in the transition to democracy.

In order to better understand their contradictory viewpoints regarding Bangkok, it was considered important to establish its genealogy of urbanization, one that is more than a simple outlining of its trajectory. To gain a critical

perspective of the same, this thesis began by reviewing the usefulness of the Southeast Asian city literature, highlighting the significance of Bangkok-specific literature, which might not be as conceptually sophisticated as the former but its simple, developmentalist portrayals of Bangkok as a city in flux somehow captures the lost city of angels better than the slick repertoire of Southeast Asian city discourse. This constitutes the focus of Chapter 2 which takes its urbanization debate beyond the rhetorical tendencies of some of this literature to focus on the reality of its challenges, aspects of which can oddly be explained using the analytical filters of Southeast Asian city, such as the mega-urban region formation or more specifically, urbanization as a regional phenomenon. Its urbanization is complicated by a persistent political instability which abets the perception of an urbanization out of control by deliberately keeping planning out, and where, decisions are made politically on a project-by-project basis, little informed by any kind of expertise.

This has had a major bearing on the way the middle classes react to the city's urbanization prospects, especially one without a plan, and before we can even begin to unravel this complexity, Chapter 3 considers the specific characteristics of the Thai middle classes, acknowledging not only its heterogeneity but also finding it to be an internally polarized group between the lower and upper middle classes, a divide that has been exasperated by not only the 1997 Asian financial crisis but more importantly, the larger need to sustain a Thai-style democracy. As the Thai middle classes are essentially Bangkok middle classes, it becomes important to acknowledge not only their urban nature but also how they engage with the pursuits of the urban. This is shaped greatly by their political ideologies, one that cannot be simply reduced to a democracy versus dictatorship binary. Emphasising that their politics is more than a paradox, this chapter explores middle-class opportunism in forming and dissolving alliances with military regimes, as they try to preserve (or not) the overarching objective of preserving the royalist-nationalist hegemony.

Empirical findings are discussed in chapters 5 and 6, data for which was collected through mostly qualitative methods involving semi-structured

interviews and participant observation. Fieldwork itself turned out to be a unique and unexpected part of research design as it was carried out over a period of 3 years from 2011-13. While there were personal circumstances leading to this lengthy period of investigation, it was also driven by the country's political situation, where the 2011 national election proved to be a crucial moment to gauge middle class vibes about the nature of Thai politics and democracy. Until the elections, most Bangkokians were reluctant to discuss issues outside of this crucial event, almost thinking it too petty to obsess with the city's urban challenges when faced with the prospect of never-ending political turmoil. In 2012, fieldwork mainly revolved around the 2011 floods and its consequences. This proved to be a major topic that reinforced the split between the lower and upper middle classes, and related to this was not only their reactions to state proposed solutions to specifically counter the flood in the future but also the broader issue of planning a city like Bangkok in general. Fieldwork done in 2013 can be considered as 'backup' fieldwork where additional members of the middle classes were recruited to see if they corroborated the opinions found in 2011 and 2012, ones that could have been easily brushed aside as 'arguments that the middle classes got carried away with'.

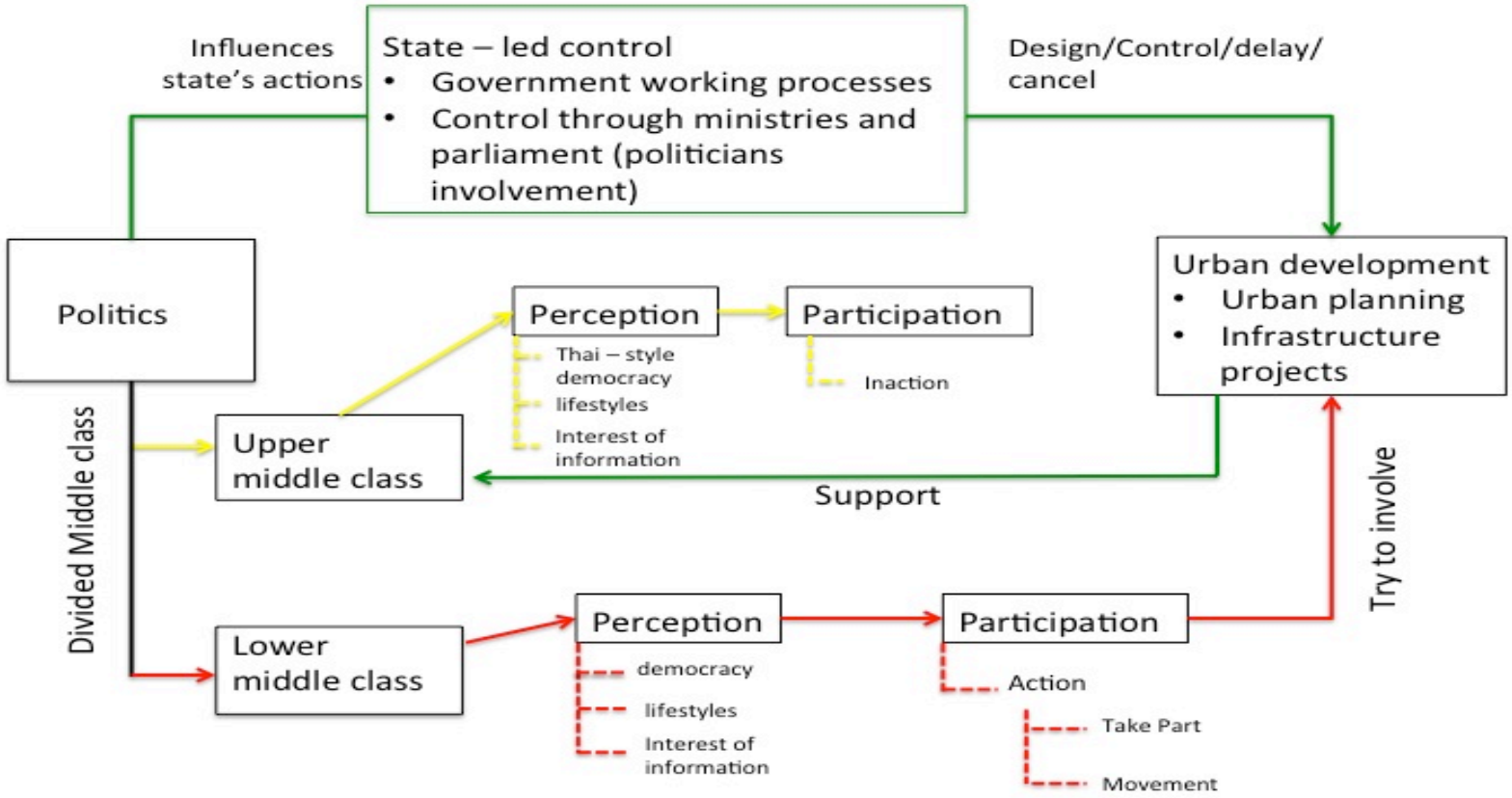
Chapter 5 finds that middle class responses to the 2011 floods is framed by their larger scepticism over the existence and possibility of any kind of planning system for Bangkok. This pessimism about the urban plan is specifically expressed by the upper middle classes for whom planning is not a techno-scientifically driven, expertise-based apolitical process, but an instrument for manipulation by the country's politicians to secure their vote banks more than anything else. This perception is, in an odd way, reinforced by the lower middle classes, who through their established client-patron relationship with the politicians, see planning as part of this bargain. The upper middle classes general distrust of politicians meant that they were not inclined to be partial towards solutions proposed in the aftermath of the 2011 floods, ones that were seen to be top-down, ill-informed, and driven by electoral gains. The fact that they were not the worst affected also meant that their dismissal of

government schemes to secure the city against future flooding possibilities were viewed as an abstraction and with suspicion. The lower middle classes, on the other hand, suffered first-hand, the consequences of the flood and were desperate for both short-term and long-term solutions, eager to support any little gesture from the state.

In exploring the supposed 'fickleness' of the middle classes, Chapter 6 looks at the city's recent transportation strategies, and its emphasis on mass rapid transit rail solutions. Since the late 1990s, the state has invested heavily in this infrastructure, conceived initially as a mega-project and whose incorporation into the landscape of everyday infrastructure hinged heavily on middle class support. Policy makers and planners thus admitted that the Bangkok SkyTrain (BTS) might have at one point commenced as a traffic solution for the city, but the reality of making it work meant that the state had to quickly reimagine it as a desirable form of travel mode for the middle classes. This exclusivity had to be reassured through higher ticket pricing and accompanying schemes such as 'park and ride' to allow the middle class a multi-modal transport option combining their private travel choices (cars) with 'public' forms of transport (BTS). Despite this deliberate ploy on part of the state, the middle classes have not embraced options such as the BTS unequivocally. For the upper middle classes, their scepticism is once again related to their concern of projects such as BTS becoming an electoral ploy to attract votes and not a meaningful solution to solve the city's transport woes. Despite this reasoning, the upper middle classes are keen to safeguard BTS's exclusivity by opposing arguments to lower its price. As the BTS emerges as a lifestyle choice for the upper middle classes, the BTS is a symbol of a corridor of consumption, one that appeals easily to the upper middle classes. For those on the lower rungs of the middle class, the BTS comes across as a desirable but unaffordable transport choice where they find state supported supplementary schemes such as park and ride provisions at the station to cater to the upper classes and not themselves. The geography of the station locations also means that the BTS hasn't evolved into an everyday infrastructure for them, remaining well beyond their reach.

As the thesis draws to a close, it efforts to capture the intricate relationship between the middle classes (mainly the two main sub-groups), the broader aspect of Thai politics and Thai state and the more specific nature of Bangkok's urbanization is show in Figure 7-1 (below).

Figure 7-1: Conclusion diagram



Link number one, presented in green shows how politics informs urban development mostly through the planning process, one that is clearly controlled by the state. Whatever proposals emerge as a result as often directed at the upper middle classes but who may not return the sentiment back. The weakness of planning as a political process is further exasperated under the conditions of a Thai-style democracy which makes the upper middle classes even less enthusiastic about their prospects. Between 2005 and 2013, Thailand had six governments, not to mention the ongoing protests by the two main parties PAD and UDD that continue to dominate Bangkok at frequent intervals. This has not only caused delays to many of the proposed projects but it also means that most decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, it is not just the middle classes who act with vested self-interest but politicians as well. The efforts by Pheu Thai Party to expedite the SkyTrain project was clearly aimed at garnering crucial middle class support which the cancellation by the subsequent military government of their flood protection schemes was clearly vindictive.

While the lower middle classes have not been clearly privileged by the planning process, this thesis finds that they perceive planning as a political tool and hence something to be bargained for through the patronage politics, and also through possibilities of public participation. The upper middle classes, on the other hand, remain indifferent to the possibilities of reaping specific benefits from planning, precise for the same reasons – its contamination by politics, as a result of which, even though schemes may be directly targeted at them, they are quick to dismiss such proposals questioning their feasibility and viability. The fracture within the middle classes into the lower and upper categories has been not only due to the sustained period of political instability but also due to the 1997 Asian financial crisis where the lower end of the middle classes were almost instantaneously impoverished while the upper middle classes with their alliances with the old elites were able to secure themselves economically against this fiscal shock. It is in this context, that the above diagram shows the emergence of the two specific sub-categories as a direct outcome of Thai politics. Upper middle class support for Thai-style democracy is driven by their compromise position around the impossibility of pure democracy and their

greater concern about the morality of the political leader rather than perfecting the democratic system (Eawsriwong 2010; Maisrikrod 1997; Sonttisumphan 2010; Sattayanuruk 2014).

What emerges from this diagram is that political instability has paradoxically empowered the state to make ad hoc planning decisions, which remains weak in this condition. This has a knock on effect on Bangkok's urbanization where, in the absence of a comprehensive plan, the city is left to cope with piecemeal planning gestures. While arguments about middle class hegemony driving the planning of cities such as Bangkok might be an exaggeration, what is clear is they are beneficiaries by default. The rupturing of what is an inherent middle class heterogeneity into lower and upper middle classes is not directly acknowledged by the state, and this complicates the way one assumes middle class engagement with state proposals for the city's development – there is often not outright support, with one member of the middle classes supporting the scheme and the other opposing it, meaning those who benefit from it in the end might not be the most deserving. This also explains why middle classes at the broader political level keep swinging between democracy and dictatorship. It is not the they act as one coherent group constantly changing their mind, but it is simply an indication of which sub-category within the middle classes influence the majority action – if it is driven by the lower middle classes then they would tend to vote for democracy while if the steer is from the upper middle classes then they would favour dictatorship. Thus, what we are witnessing here is not so much what Wright Mills (1951) suggested when he maintained that there can be no distinctly middle class political movement given their diversity and contradiction. Rather, what we find here in the case of the Bangkok middle classes is closer to Koo's (1991) observation that the middle class who occupy a position close to the working class are more likely to show similar behaviour traits which those who are closer to the capitalist class are likely to become a conservative force in political transition. This indicates not a simplification but a specific manifestation of middle class plurality, one that is striated into distinctive categories by the vagaries of Thai politics.

This does not discount the fact that the middle class, irrespective of its own internal polarisation, plays a strong role in cementing Bangkok's undesirable urbanisation trends, hinging mainly on segregation and the creation of landscapes of exclusion. Bangna and Bangyai at a fundamental level signify the centre-periphery divide that one encounters in most cities, with the peri-urban location of Bangyai further marginalised through a patchy infrastructure planning that privileges the upper middle classes. What is perhaps missing in this narrative is the position of the middle classes vis a vis the poor and the vulnerability of the middle class, especially those in the lower end, in terms of impoverishment if Thailand should be rocked by another financial crisis in the future. Bangkok is no stranger to the all too familiar tales of the poor being pushed out of the city as Chapter 2 showed. While major infrastructure corridors provide an opportunity for the growing middle classes to settle in new developments along the expressways and transportation hubs, the poor are relegated further inland with little connections and longer commutes. What would be useful to explore here is the potential for socio-political collectivity between the lower middle class and the poor and the possibility of new forms of civic alliances as they share similar concerns. This, in many ways reminds us of Lawson's (2012) more nuanced approach to the poverty politics of middle class actors where the middle class groups are prone as much to political alliance with the poor and subaltern groups as they are in emphasising their distinction from the classes below them, often through violent tactics. We cannot deny that the current political crisis in Thailand is triggering dramatic socio-spatial restructuring of Bangkok, intensifying its material inequality through discursive boundary making amidst a weakened civil society. In a way, this is a drawback of this thesis as it focuses on the aspirational politics of residents of Bangna and Bangyai, i.e. what they seek to achieve, missing out perhaps on the crude reality of their efforts 'to keep others out'. Situating this middle-class analysis relationally against the politics of the poor within a city like Bangkok thus becomes crucial and one that needs to be taken up urgently.

This brings up the question of specificity of Bangkok's politics, at least in its current moment as it remains comfortably couched within a hard to replicate Thai-style democracy. While the thesis established early on its reluctance to embrace fully the conceptual framework offered by the discourse of Southeast Asian cities, conversely we need to reflect on what lessons might we offer to our understanding of Southeast Asian urbanism by locating Bangkok on its own. At one level, dissatisfaction with the Southeast Asian city literature stemmed rather pettily from its tendency to construct a hierarchy of cities with Bangkok relegated to the bottom rung, a city of little consequence. And yet, Bangkok-specific literature, as Chapter 2 found, has done little to redeem the city's significance within the geography of Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, what this thesis does is challenge the complacence of the Southeast Asian city discourse, going beyond its acknowledged plurality to suggest that we rethink the way we might regionalise urban studies, amidst calls for provincializing global urbanism (Sheppard et al. 2013). That the Southeast Asian city remains an unstable entity is seen in the way the region's conformist scholars are constantly forced to revise their position. Thus, McGee's understanding of the Southeast Asian city has travelled a long road from the 1960s to the twenty-first century, one that cannot be simply summarised as a transition from developmentalist understandings of a Third World city to a convergence with a global city, as Dick and Rimmer (1998) have argued. At the same time, simply suggesting that we need to postcolonialise the debate is equally insufficient. And as this thesis through its study of Bangkok and its swarming particularities shows, globalisation still remains pertinent, even if tangentially. Even as any effort at comparative thinking is rendered difficult, it is here that the focus on the middle classes comes in useful as there is an urgent need to revisit academic scholarship on Southeast Asian middle class which seems to have stalled around the pro-democracy movements of the early 1990s and needs to be updated to a point where they can offer a sharp analytical lens to understanding urban transformations taking place across Southeast Asian cities without being reduced to the jargon of neoliberalisation.

7.1 Final thoughts

This thesis began in 2010, at a moment when Thai political crisis had peaked with fatal consequences on the streets of Bangkok. As a dissertation that was initially framed as an enquiry into the politics of Bangkok's middle classes, it seemed highly insensitive to venture out into the field, at this point, soliciting middle class views on a politics that was not only socially divisive but also tended to kill. Much of the fieldwork material that was gathered in 2011 had to be carefully assessed as it was clear that middle class interviews were either high on emotion, never going beyond a rant, or they were tight-lipped about revealing their political loyalties. There was a moment of panic where confronted with the possibility of 'poor' data from field. This first fieldwork was an eye opener as it became clear that rather than confronting the middle classes about their meta-political ideologies directly, more could be learned by framing questions around everyday politics – mainly the politics of planning the city. This loosened their tongues and got them talking. If politics is not the favourite punching bag of the middle classes, then that honour surely goes to planning. Here, a different kind of challenge was encountered: without a cue, middle class residents would simply veer off on a caustic reprimand of the city's failure at planning. Getting them to think systemically at times felt like manipulating the participant but it was important to rein in the focus. Entering and exiting the field over the course of the next 5 years, there was a constant fear that with a changing political scenario, the middle classes might change their mind and what they said previously would become irrelevant. However, instead of going back to the same set of interviewees asking them to revisit some of their discussions, new set of participants were solicited each time, mainly to corroborate the narratives that emerged from the older material. Ironically, this proved to be the pitfall of 'researching in the present' where there was the threat of the empirical data getting outdated quickly, being supplanted by the now rather than the then.

In a sense, finding a closure for this thesis has been the greatest challenge as there is no resolution to the political crisis in Thailand, Bangkok's planning woes continue, and the rupture within the middle classes into the

lower and the upper middle class prevails, extending beyond a mere indication of its heterogeneity. While this might seem too easy and neat a bifurcation, especially given the struggle of sociologists to come up with a meaningful way of quantifying and classifying the middle classes, the decision to adhere to this binary is not merely due to a methodological simplification. Instead, most participants were solicited through a process of self-identification, and this is typical to the middle classes. One subscribes to being a member of the middle classes, not based on an economic criteria such as income but due to what many have come to recognize as a 'middle class mentality'. This sufficiently resulted in 90 odd interviews, and hence was considered as a successful approach, although this might not be seen by all as a rigorous one. The lack of a stronger political agency of the middle classes in influencing the making of a Bangkok plan or at least a semblance of it was somewhat of a surprise finding, especially given the recent scholarship on middle classes making much of their role as dominant socio-political actors. This might be unique to the larger context of a volatile Thai politics that discourages them from proactively engaging with planning. But this also means that the conclusions drawn here might have a limited shelf life, as they might become redundant in the wake of a proper political resolution or stabilization. This is, of course, purely conjectural, and the thesis is left open ended for a revisit if the political situation changes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Bangkok Metropolitan Region Urban Plan Development

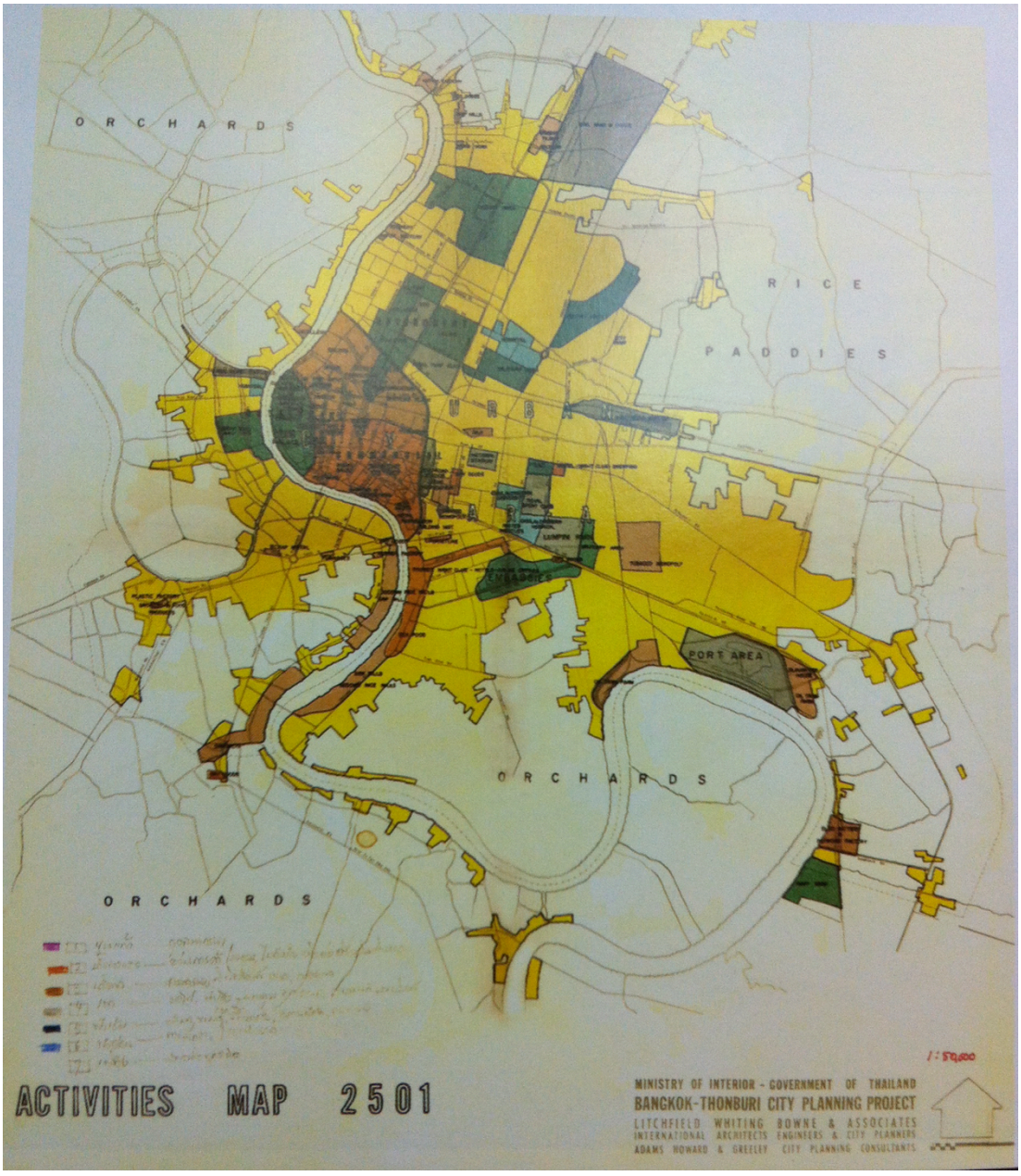
This section aims to give some background information to supplement the discussion of BMR Urban planning in Chapter 5. It also demonstrates how slow the process of urban planning in is reality and explores why Bangkok citizens, particularly the middle classes, do not trust urban planning processes. This explains to a large extent why the BMR urban plan has been accused as being a backward plan, one that is forever failing to catch up with the actual growth of the city.

As discussed in Chapter 5, urban planning has a negative reputation in terms of ineffectiveness. BMR planning has slowly developed and it has been ineffective tool to control the city's growth. The first official Bangkok Planning was the Greater Bangkok Plan 2533 (Figure A-1), which was produced by American company, Litchfield Whiting Bowne (see Chapter 5). However, this plan has never been implemented; there was no urban planning act to support such an implementation. While the government processed the urban planning act, the urban planning authority made another plan for Bangkok to be implemented through several government agencies, nevertheless, this plan was not officially used in the city. The plan, 'Pang-Nakhon-Luang I' (Capital Plan I) (Figure A-2) was used to supplement government infrastructure building projects such as road and water systems.

Sixteen years later (1985), the Thai government finally launched the urban planning act to support urban planning across the city. This was the beginning of developing Bangkok and other cities in Thailand. By that time, the Greater Bangkok Plan 2533 was out of date. The local urban plan produced new planning based on the Great Bangkok Plan 2533. The new planned was called 'Pang-Nakhon-Luang 2543' (Capital Plan 2543) (Figure A-3). Nonetheless, this

plan was not the first that got off ground; the first urban was due in the year 2000 (see Chapter 5).

Figure A-1: Greater Bangkok Plan 2533

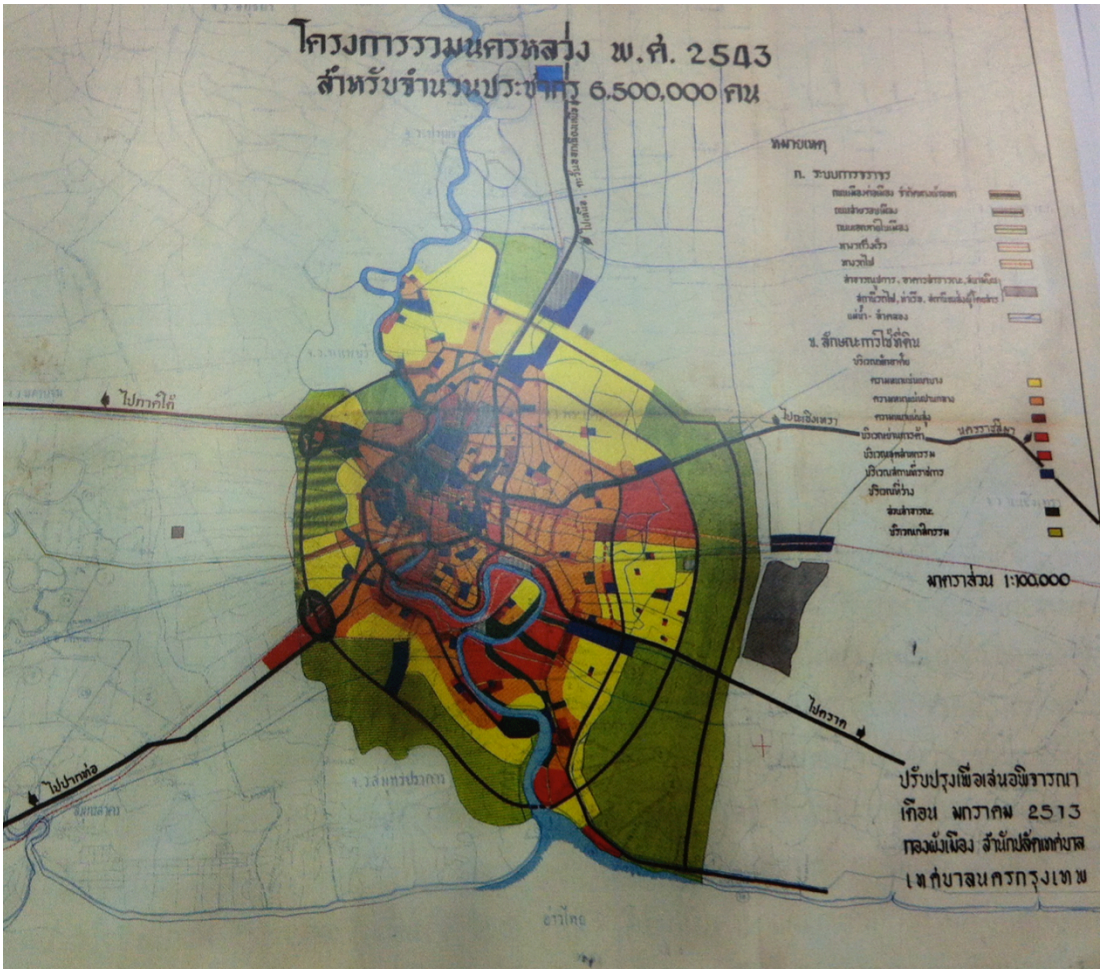


Source: Department of City Planning (2011)

Figure A-2: 'Pang-Nakhon-Luang I' (Capital Plan I)

Source: Department of City Planning (2011)

Figure A-3: 'Pang-Nakhon- Luang 2543' (Capital Plan 2543)



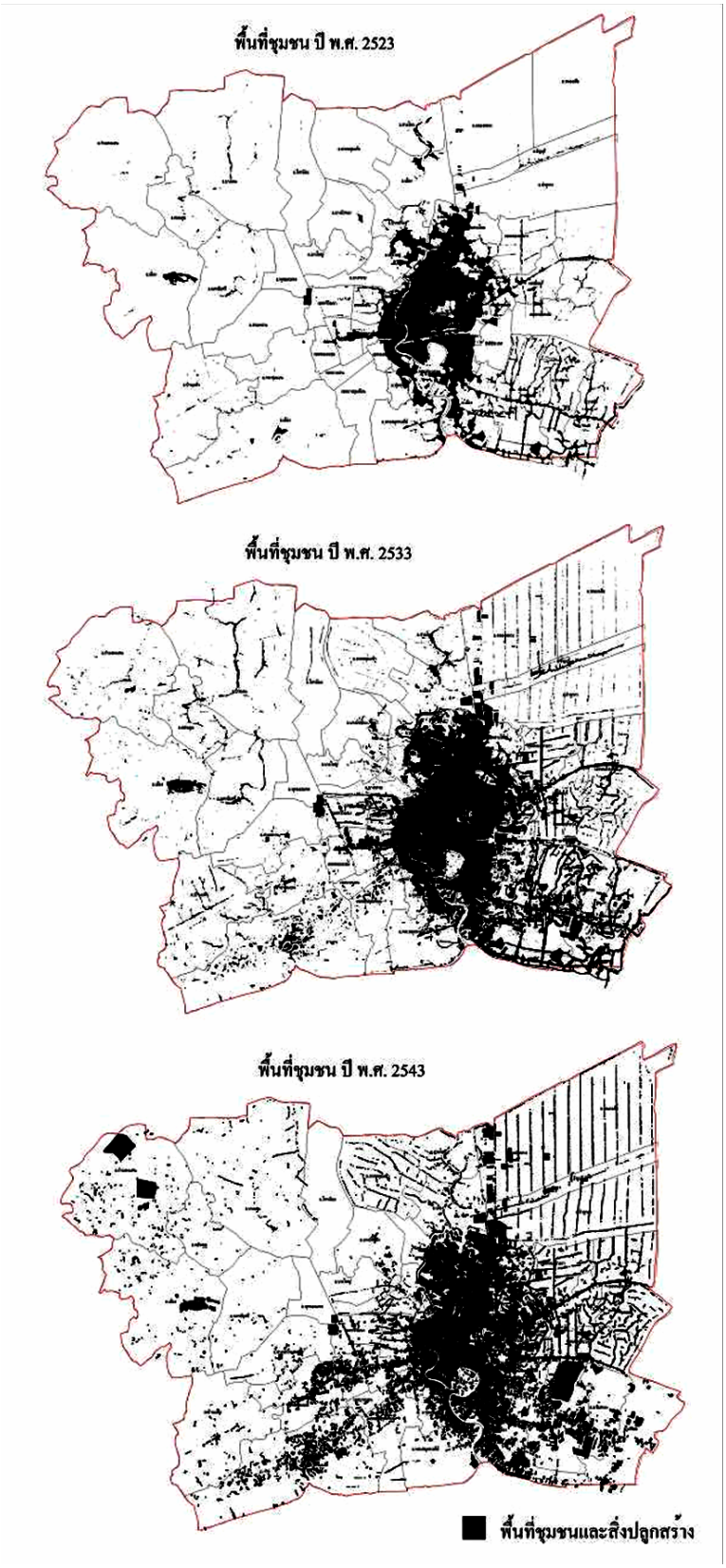
Source: Department of City Planning (2011)

Table A-1: A comparison of Bangkok Urban Area growth and Urban Planning Development Process

Year	BMR Urban Area (Square Kilometres)[21]	Urban Planning Development
1947	67	No Urban Plan
1956	90	Greater Bangkok Plan 2533 started to be produced
1967	143.42	Urban Planning Act was processing an announcement
1970	185	Pang-Nakhon- Luang 2543 was implemented among government agencies
1986	347.39	The Urban Planning Act to support urban plan implementation was applied
1995	585.54	Pang-Nakhon- Luang 2543 - already made, but was not widely implemented
2000	672.39	The first Bangkok Urban Planning was actually implemented

[21] Askew (1994) and Bangkok Administration Information Centre (n.d.)

Figure A-4: Growth of Bangkok Metropolitan Region built – up area. Top map is built- up area in 1980, middle and bottom maps are build – up area in 1990 and 2000

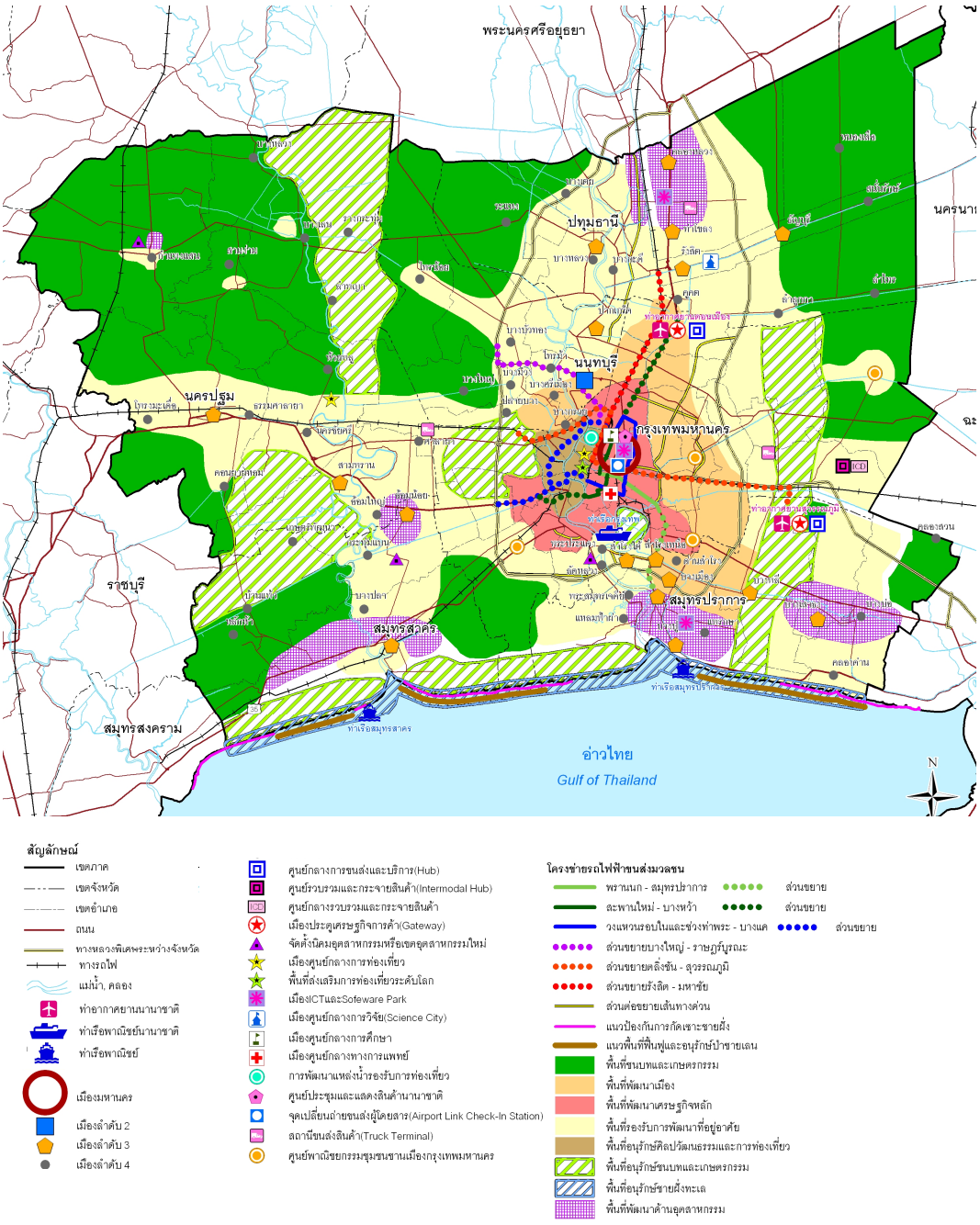


Source: Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning (n.d.)

According to Table A-1, it should not be surprising why urban planning cannot control the urbanisation of Bangkok. The delayed urban plan allowed Bangkok city to build up beyond control for almost a half century. Comparing Figure A-2 and Figure A-3 to Figure A–4, this shows that Bangkok's urban planning does not cover the built-up area at the time. It is very unfortunate that the urban plan did not cover all of the urban area of approximately 600SQ KM. The hope is to ensure better control of the future plans. Unfortunately, the Bangkok urban plan is still working slowly and is behind the growth of the city, as mentioned in Chapter 5, the BMR urban plan is always out of date and being re-produced.

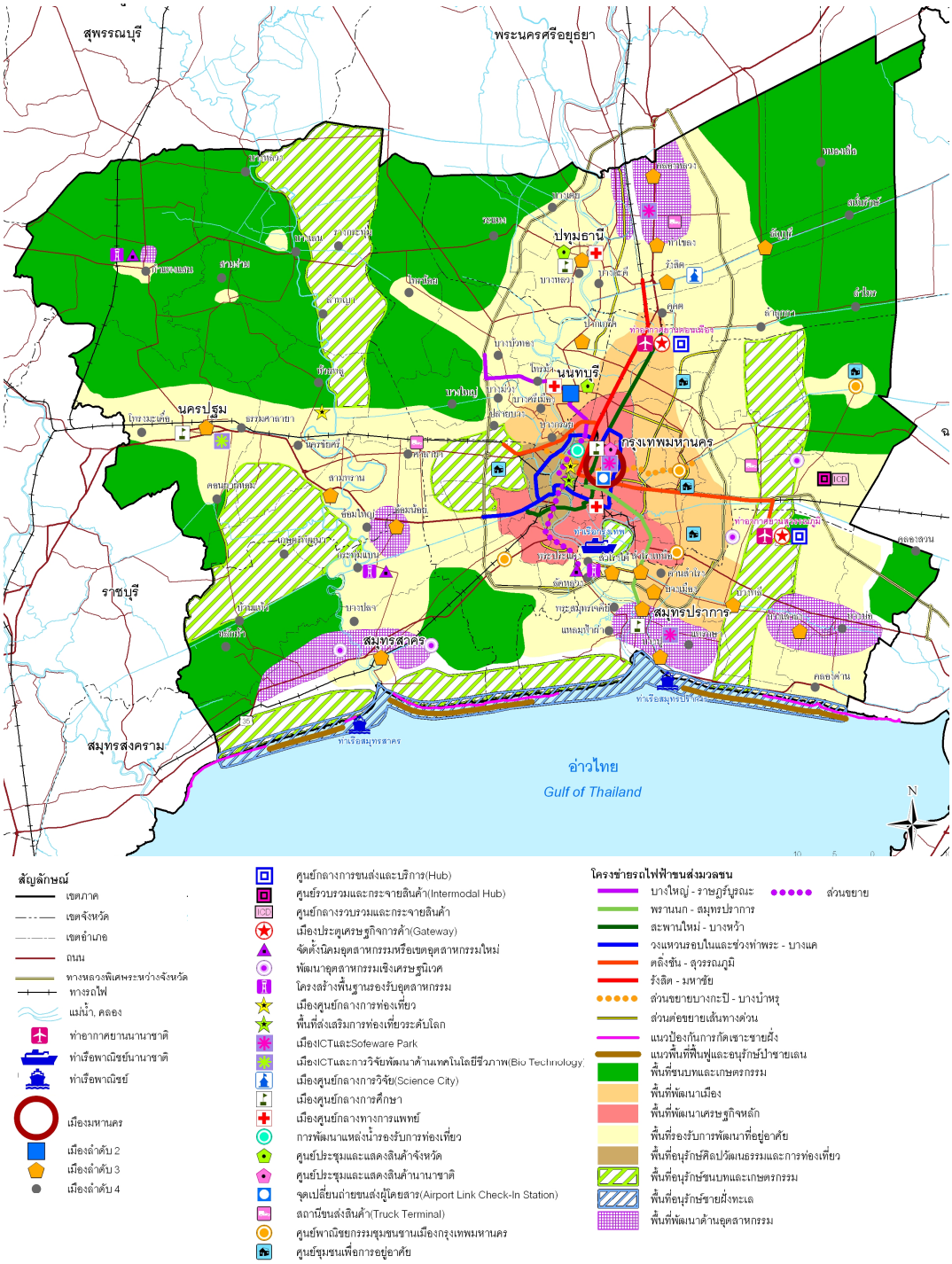
However, the BMR planning authority has been trying to solve the problems. There is a future plan report called 'Bangkok and Vicinities Regional Plan 2600'. This plan was comprehensive, including a land-use plan, infrastructure plan, hospitality facilities among other services. Figure A-5, Figure A-6 and Figure A-7 are urban land-use and infrastructure plans for 2012, 2017 and 2022. Hopefully the planning will be effectively implemented. Since this plan is only a report, the 2017 and 2022 plan has not yet been officially announced. It is more of a guideline and prediction of how the BMR in 2017 and 2022 should be, rather than an actual plan to shape the BMR in a particular direction.

Figure A-5: BMR Urban land-use and infrastructure plan 2012



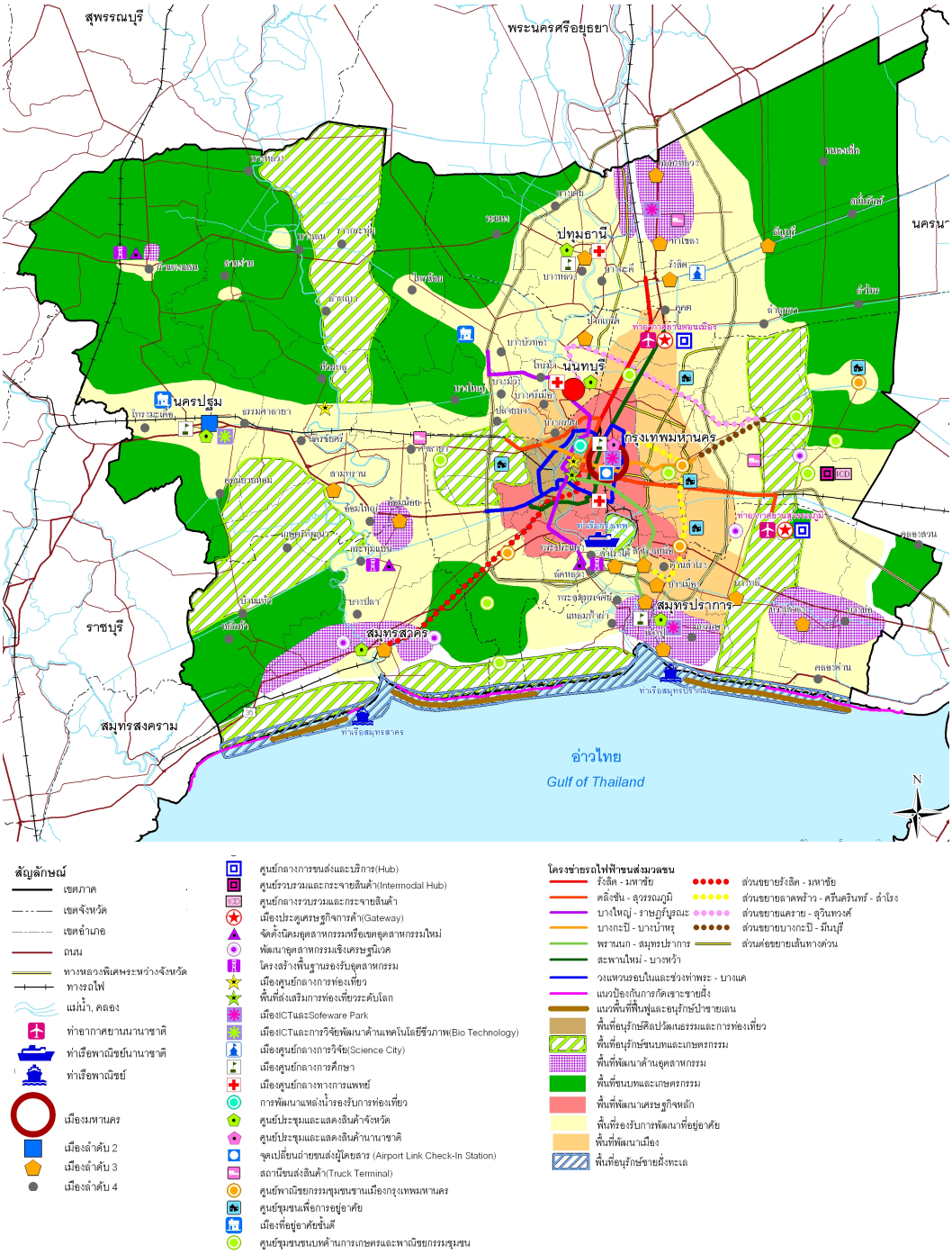
Source: Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning (n.d.)

Figure A-6: BMR Urban land-use and infrastructure plan 2017



Source: Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning (n.d.)

Figure A-7: BMR Urban land-use and infrastructure plan 2022



Source: Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning (n.d.)

Appendix 2 General Information: Bangkok Public Transportation Systems

Statistical information provided in this section aims to give a better understanding of Bangkok Public transportation system to supplement the discussion of middle class mobility (Chapter 6). Since this thesis uses the Bangkok Skytrain to examine middle class perceptions of a mega urban project, it would be useful to understand how mass transit rail system seems to be crucial to the city. Moreover, this research focused only on Bangkok SkyTrain, which is one of the two rail mass transit systems in the city. This section will explain why the underground system was not included in the study.

Bangkok provides buses, the SkyTrain, an underground network, Chao – Praya boat buses, Saen Saeb canal boat buses and paratransit vehicles. Chao – Praya boat buses and Saen Saeb canal boat buses might be the least popular options for most commuters since the services are limited. It is not only limited by the coverage of river and canal accessibility, but also because of the network of services, as shown in Figure A-8 and A-9.

Figure A-8: Chao – Praya Boat Bus Route Map.

The blue dots represent the boat bus pier.

Source: Department of City Planning (2008)

Figure A-9: Saen Saeb Boat Bus Route Map.

Source: Researcher (6th September, 2013)

Usually the boat buses are used as a supplement transport system in a commuter's journey, since the boat services do not go into the city, but only to places along Chao Praya River and Saen Saeb canal. Commuters usually use boat buses with other types of transport. For example, commuters may take buses to a boat bus pier and take the boat bus to their final destination.

Bus services are among the oldest forms of public transport and cover most of the BMR. Buses form the transport service that connects all public transportation networks across the city. Nevertheless, the number of bus users has been constantly declining since 1992.

Table A-2: Buses Passengers from 1993-2006

Years	Passengers
1992	4,073,883
1993	3,787,103
1994	2,506,255
1995	3,379,584
1996	3,325,352
1997	3,352,554
1998	3,180,626
1999	2,928,975
2000	2,811,440
2001	2,570,656
2002	2,525,173
2003	2,386,612
2004	2,065,322
2005	1,955,139
2006	1,766,391

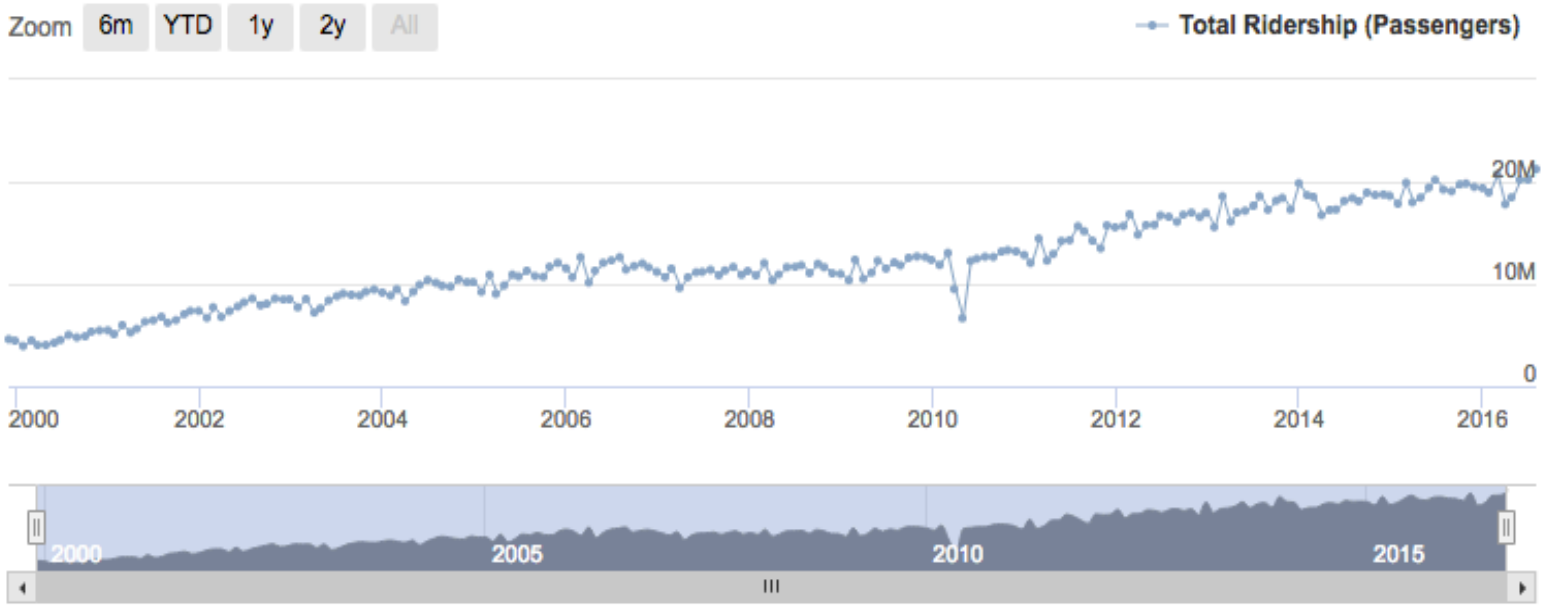
Source: Department of City Planning (2008)

As shown in Table A-2, the number of bus passengers declined by over 50 per cent in 12 years. It shows that buses are no longer popular among Bangkokians, despite a good coverage around the BMR. The number of bus passengers declined quickly after 1999 when the Bangkok SkyTrain began operating. There is no concrete evidence that the passengers who rely on buses have changed

their travel routes from buses to SkyTrain. However, the growing trend of rail mass transit users, particularly SkyTrain are opposite to that of buses users. While SkyTrain users see an upward trend, bus users are decreasing. The trend of both transport systems can be clearly seen from Table A-2, Figure A-9, and Table A-3. In the year 2005, bus passengers stood at a total of 1,955,139 people, while BTS passengers took 127,349,940 people; bus passengers were only 2 per cent of the total number. It can be implied that BTS has served Bangkok citizens more than buses, although the coverage services of BTS are limited in the CBD. Moreover, Table A-2 and Table A-3 show that BTS has the highest number of passengers among the three systems: buses, BTS and MRTA. This might be the reason why policy makers hope that Bangkok mass transit rail systems will be able to motivate Bangkok citizens to use more public transportation in order to solve traffic congestion (see Chapter 6).

Although public transportation policy makers aim for both BTS and MRTA mass transit rail systems to solve public transportation, this research is designed to focus only on BTS. First of all, the BTS service overwhelmed rail mass transit systems in terms of services. The URMAP (see Chapter 6) contains both BTS and MRTA systems; however, BTS dominates the routes. This might have been caused by lower costs in construction. The BTS construction cost is lower and also faster than that of MRTA. Therefore, MRTA was only constructed on the routes that the BTS rail would not want to be seen. Moreover, current BTS services have covered more areas than that of the MRTA service. Secondly, the BTS has more passengers than MRTA. As shown in Table A-3, BTS passengers are approximately 50 per cent higher than MRTA passengers. The two reasons reflect the crucial dominance of BTS services over MRTA. Currently, MRTA seems to be a supported service for the BTS. Lastly, the BTS is operated in both selected case study areas; therefore, it is appropriate to select the BTS as a central mega-project of the whole transportation system in Bangkok.

Figure A-10: Number of BTS passengers during 2000-2016



Remark: The following shows historical data for ridership on the BTS Core Network

Source: Bangkok Mass Transit Public Company Limited (n.d.)

Table A-3: Comparison of BTS and MRTA Passengers during 2005-2010

Year	BTS (SkyTrain) Passengers	MRTA (Underground) Passengers
2005	127,349,940	56,458,058
2006	140,051,302	57,826,471
2007	133,071,837	59,910,204
2008	136,348,000	62,108,418
2009	140,964,000	63,726,982
2010	143,141,000	64,913,628

Source: Department of City Planning (2012)

Appendix 3 Interview Schedule

Table A-4: List of Key informants (Academic, Planners, Transportation Policies Makers, Journalist, etc.)

	Name/Working Title	Organisation	Interview Date
1	Scholar 01	Chulalongkorn University	Multiple
2	Scholar 02	Chulalongkorn University	Multiple
3	Scholar 03	Chulalongkorn University	Multiple
4	Scholar 04	Chulalongkorn University	Multiple
5	Scholar 05	Nonthaburi Office of Public Works and Town and Country Planning	Multiple
6	Scholar 06	Department of City Planning, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration	Multiple
7	Scholar 07	Department of City Planning, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration	Multiple
8	Scholar 08	Head of Rail Transport Group, Ministry of Transport	Multiple
9	Scholar 09	Journalist	Multiple
10	Scholar 10	Daily News	29/06/11
11	Scholar 11	Member of Puer Pan Din Party	19/06/11
12	Scholar 12	Honorary Chairman of Areeya Propperty PGL	19/09/11
13	Scholar 13	Deputy Chief Executive of the Subdistrict Administrative Organisation	24/07/12

	Name/Working Title	Organisation	Interview Date
14	Scholar 14	Former Deputy Chief Executive of the Subdistrict Administrative Organisation	24/07/12
15	Scholar 15	Former Thai Journalist Association	20/08/12
16	Scholar 16	Office of Transport and Traffic Policy and Planning	06/09/12
17	Scholar 17	Jouranlist	22/07/13
18	Scholar 18	Former Minister of Minitry of Digital Economy and Society	25/07/13
19	Scholar 19	Huachiew Chalermprakiet University	28/08/13
20	Scholar 20	Executive Director of BTS Group Holding Co. Ltd	03/09/13
21	Scholar 21	Acting Director Policy and Strategy, Bureau of Thailand Ministry of Transport	17/09/13
22	Scholar 22	Chairwomen of the Board of MRTA (2013)	23/09/13

Table A-5: List of residents interviewed

	Name Code	Neighborhood	Interview Date	Taped/ Transcribed	Occupation	Gender	Age
1	BN1101	Bangna	28/06/11	Field notes	Manager of Bank Branch	F	45
2	BN1102	Bangna	28/06/11	Field notes	White collar	F	25
3	BN1103	Bangna	29/06/11	Field notes	Lawyer	M	61
4	BN1104	Bangna	12/07/11	Yes/Yes	Interior designer	F	23
5	BN1105	Bangna	12/07/11	Yes/Yes	Vice President Hino Manufacturing Thailand	M	52
6	BN1106	Bangna	12/07/11	Field notes	Self - Employed	F	60
7	BN1107	Bangna	13/07/11	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	27
8	BN1108	Bangna	13/07/11	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	52
9	BN1109	Bangna	13/07/11	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	28
10	BN1110	Bangna	14/07/11	Field notes	White collar	F	32
11	BY1101	Bangyai	15/07/11	Yes/Yes	Self - Employed	M	65
12	BY1102	Bangyai	15/07/11	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	24
13	BY1103	Bangyai	16/07/11	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	27
14	BY1104	Bangyai	16/07/11	Yes/Yes	White collar	M	28
15	BY1105	Bangyai	16/07/11	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	M	57
16	BY1106	Bangyai	17/07/11	Field notes	Civil Servant	M	44
17	BY1107	Bangyai	17/07/11	Field notes	Self - Employed	M	53
18	BY1108	Bangyai	17/07/11	Field notes	Civil Servant	M	43
19	BY1109	Bangyai	18/07/11	Field notes	Civil Servant	F	35
20	BY1110	Bangyai	18/07/11	Yes/Yes	White collar	M	31
21	BN1201	Bangna	16/06/12	Yes/Yes	Interior designer	F	25
22	BN1202	Bangna	20/06/12	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	48
23	BN1203	Bangna	20/06/12	Yes/Yes	Interior designer	F	24
24	BN1204	Bangna	24/06/12	Yes/Yes	White collar	M	55
25	BN1205	Bangna	02/07/12	Field notes	Self - Employed	M	25

	Name Code	Neighborhood	Interview Date	Taped/ Transcribed	Occupation	Gender	Age
26	BN1206	Bangna	03/07/12	Yes/Yes	Lawyer	F	23
27	BN1207	Bangna	07/07/12	Yes/Yes	Self - Employed	F	65
28	BN1208	Bangna	13/07/12	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	24
29	BN1209	Bangna	15/07/12	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	25
30	BN1210	Bangna	15/07/12	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	25
31	BN1211	Bangna	26/07/12	Yes/Yes	Self - Employed	F	65
32	BN1212	Bangna	11/08/12	Yes/Yes	Pharmacist	F	42
33	BN1213	Bangna	08/08/12	Field notes	Self - Employed	F	55
34	BN1214	Bangna	10/08/12	Field notes	Self - Employed	F	58
35	BN1215	Bangna	13/08/12	Field notes	Civil Servant	M	58
36	BN1216	Bangna	16/08/12	Yes/Yes	Small Business Owner	F	31
37	BN1217	Bangna	16/08/12	Yes/Yes	Small Business Owner	F	58
38	BN1218	Bangna	21/08/12	Yes/Yes	High School Teacher	F	55
39	BN1219	Bangna	23/08/12	Field notes	White collar	F	50
40	BN1220	Bangna	23/08/12	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	42
41	BY1201	Bangyai	07/06/11	Yes/Yes	Retired Civil Servant	M	61
42	BY1202	Bangyai	08/06/11	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	25
43	BY1203	Bangyai	17/7/12	Yes/Yes	Self - Employed	M	45
44	BY1204	Bangyai	17/07/12	Yes/Yes	Small Business Owner	M	48
45	BY1205	Bangyai	17/07/12	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	M	46
46	BY1206	Bangyai	18/07/12	Yes/Yes	Lawyer	M	55
47	BY1207	Bangyai	19/07/12	Yes/Yes	Soldier	M	40
48	BY1208	Bangyai	19/07/12	Yes/Yes	Retired Civil Servant	M	63
49	BY1209	Bangyai	19/07/12	Field notes	Local School Teacher	F	53
50	BY1210	Bangyai	21/07/12	Yes/Yes	White collar	M	25

	Name Code	Neighborhood	Interview Date	Taped/ Transcribed	Occupation	Gender	Age
51	BY1211	Bangyai	21/07/12	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	M	59
52	BY1212	Bangyai	21/07/12	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	M	45
53	BY1213	Bangyai	23/07/12	Yes/Yes	Self - Employed	M	47
54	BY1214	Bangyai	23/07/12	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	M	49
55	BY1215	Bangyai	23/07/12	Field notes	Lawyer	M	58
56	BY1216	Bangyai	23/07/12	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	M	45
57	BY1217	Bangyai	25/07/12	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	M	52
58	BY1218	Bangyai	25/07/12	Yes/Yes	Self - Employed	M	56
59	BY1219	Bangyai	25/07/12	Yes/Yes	Self - Employed	M	57
60	BY1220	Bangyai	27/07/12	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	M	54
61	BN1301	Bangna	27/08/13	Yes/Yes	Self - Employed	F	28
62	BN1302	Bangna	01/09/13	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	32
63	BN1303	Bangna	03/09/13	Field notes	White collar	F	32
64	BN1304	Bangna	03/09/13	Field notes	White collar	M	32
65	BN1305	Bangna	04/09/13	Field notes	White collar	F	35
66	BN1306	Bangna	04/09/13	Field notes	White collar	F	34
67	BN1307	Bangna	05/0913	Yes/Yes	Small Business Owner	M	55
68	BN1308	Bangna	05/09/13	Yes/Yes	Small Business Owner	F	45
69	BN1309	Bangna	10/09/13	Field notes	White collar	F	26
70	BN1310	Bangna	13/09/13	Field notes	Self - Employed	F	50
71	BN1311	Bangna	13/09/13	Yes/Yes	Small Business Owner	F	54
72	BN1312	Bangna	13/09/13	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	30
72	BN1313	Bangna	14/09/13	Yes/Yes	Self - Employed	M	31
74	BN1314	Bangna	14/09/13	Field notes	White collar	F	27
75	BN1314	Bangna	14/09/13	Yes/No	White collar	F	54
76	BY1302	Bangyai	02/09/13	Yes/Yes	Veterinarian	F	30
77	BY1302	Bangyai	25/08/13	Yes/Yes	Retired Civil	M	62

	Name Code	Neighborhood	Interview Date	Taped/ Transcribed	Occupation	Gender	Age
					servant/Lecturer		
78	BY1303	Bangyai	25/08/13	Yes/Yes	Retired Civil Servant	M	62
79	BY1304	Bangyai	25/08/13	Yes/Yes	Retired Civil Servant	M	65
80	BY1305	Bangyai	28/08/13	Yes/No	White collar	F	32
81	BY1306	Bangyai	01/09/13	Yes/Yes	Pharmacist	M	59
82	BY1307	Bangyai	01/09/13	Field notes	Retired Civil Servant/Lecturer	M	65
83	BY1308	Bangyai	07/09/13	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	55
84	BY1309	Bangyai	08/09/13	Yes/Yes	White collar	F	30
85	BY1310	Bangyai	11/09/13	Yes/No	Self - Employed	F	65
86	BY1311	Bangyai	11/09/13	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	F	40
87	BY1312	Bangyai	11/09/13	Yes/No	Civil Servant	M	36
88	BY1313	Bangyai	11/09/13	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	M	45
89	BY1314	Bangyai	12/09/13	Yes/Yes	Civil Servant	F	32
90	BY1315	Bangyai	12/09/13	Field notes	Civil Servant	M	47